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ABSTRACT

Exploring a variety of ways to train students to think critically within the context of writing and literature classes, this journal issue presents cognitive strategies for teaching poetry, short stories, composition, the research paper, and critical reading. The titles of the articles and their authors are as follows: (1) "Constructing the Critical View" (Randall Stiffler); (2) "Bringing the Burger to Saigon" (Sue Howell); (3) "Listing and Clustering: A Strategy for Teaching Categorizing" (Gerald Grunska); (4) "Using Original Surveys to Promote Thinking in Library Research Projects" (Leigh Henson); (5) "Cognitive Strategies to Use with Basic Writers" (Sallyanne H. Fitzgerald); (6) "Two Strategies for Combining Thinking and Writing" (Lucille C. Bruch); (7) "Teaching Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum: Notes from a Traveling Writing Teacher" (Dora Tippens); (8) "Teaching the Critical Analysis" (Marsha C. Bryant); (9) "The Logic in Mystery" (Jay Fox and Mike Rusniak); (10) "Verbalizing Nonverbal Knowledge" (Deborah H. Pickering); (11) "Sensitizing Students to Nonverbal Language" (Patrick L. McKiernan); and (12) "A Critical Pursuit of Cues: Introducing Semiotics" (James Fulcher). (HTH)

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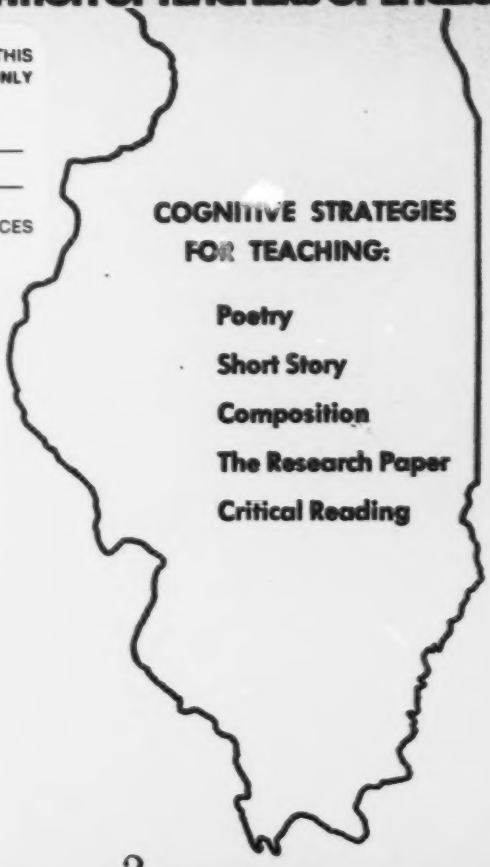

COGNITIVE STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING:

Poetry

Short Story

Composition

The Research Paper

Critical Reading

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ILLINOIS ENGLISH BULLETIN

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About This Issue

This issue explores a variety of ways of training students to think critically within the context of writing and literature classes. Professor Randall Stiffler, a University of Illinois graduate now teaching at Boston University, opens with a tri-structured approach to the analysis of poetry, throwing light on the construction of the critical view. Basic exercises in logic appropriate for high school classes are described by Sue Howell and Gerald Grunska, both of whom specify how they introduce the analysis and categorizing of data. Several articles describe cognitive strategies of use when teaching writing in a wide variety of classroom situations: a library research project in high school (Henson), a basic developmental composition course at an urban university (Fitzgerald), a humanities course in rhetoric (Bruch), a cross-curriculum service in a community college (Tippens), and an advanced writing unit on the analysis of literature (Bryant). Two teachers from Conant High School in Hoffman Estates (Fox and Rusniak) share their successful method of encouraging critical thinking while teaching a mystery story by Edgar Allan Poe. Then two articles (Pickering and McKiernan) present ways of developing student sensitivity to nonverbal communication. The issue closes with a plea for the use of semiotics in a college humanities course. James Fulcher of Lincoln College states essential axioms of this perspective and shows how the critical response to a text can be deepened by an awareness of signs, intertexts, and coding. For English teachers who have heard of semiotics but have not studied it, Professor Fulcher offers a good introduction.

Dorothy Matthews
Editor

Constructing the Critical View

Randall Stiffler
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Boston University

If poems are taught as interpretations and not as poems suggesting interpretations, students will learn only the poems they are taught and only the interpretations they are offered. They will not acquire the skills which help to build interpretations, they will not gain confidence about reading poems on their own, and they will not be able to decide, on the basis of the evidence, between conflicting or alternative interpretations. Students need not be left out of the process of forming disciplined and intelligent interpretations, however. They simply need the means by which to approach the poem and to gather relevant evidence. In the following pages, I want to point out three simple structures that students can look for in poems. Two of these structures, narration and description, are traditional rhetorical modes of organization that students may be familiar with from composition courses. Diction, the third structure, will probably be new to students because its use as a structuring principle occurs almost exclusively in lyric poems. By being attentive to these and other structural devices, I want to suggest, students can approach poems independently and can gather evidence in a methodical way. They can then assemble and manipulate that evidence to construct their own interpretations. As a result, I think, students will become better equipped to read and discuss poems and other texts. In addition, by observing how experience and ideas can be organized and how language can work, students can learn useful things to apply to their own writing.

In prose as well as poetry, perhaps the simplest way to structure a text is with a sequence of events, a narrative line. That line can be detected by answering the simple question, *What happens in this poem?* That question is simple, but answering it accurately requires careful reading and attention to detail. In Theodore Roethke's poem, "The Geranium," for example, the narrative line is not a straight one:

> When I put her out, once, by the garbage pail,
> She looked so limp and bedraggled,
> So foolish and trusting, like a sick poodle,
> Or a wizened aster in late September,
> I brought her back in again
> For a new routine—

Vitamins, water, and whatever
Sustenance seemed sensible
At the time: she'd lived
So long on gin, bobbie pins, half-smoked cigars, dead beer,
Her shriveled petals falling
On the faded carpet, the stale
Steak grease stuck to her fuzzy leaves.
(Dried-out, she creaked like a tulip.)

The things she endured!—
The dumb dames shrieking half the night
Or the two of us, alone, both seedy,
Me breathing booze at her,
She leaned out of her pot toward the window.

Near the end, she seemed almost to hear me—
And that was scary—
So when that snuffling cretin of a maid
Threw her, pot and all, into the trash-can,

I said nothing.

But I sacked the presumptuous hag the next week,
I was that lonely.

Theodore Roethke, *The Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), 228.

Since narrative is an organization of events as they happen in time, we need to pay particular attention to verbs and their tenses, and to certain words, typically adverbs, like "then," "after," and "once." Roethke's poem clearly takes place in the past, but it is a vibrant past in which time still moves. The course of the narrative sequence is complicated by progressions and regressions. For example, Roethke begins by describing one completed event: he put the geranium out, "once," and then he "brought her back in again." After that, he is reminded of a time before he took the geranium out: "she'd lived/So long...." These memories generate other memories, and in the second paragraph Roethke catalogs those, too. Though drawn from the past, those memories exist in the speaker's mind as present events, as events present in the telling of this tale. Significantly, Roethke renders these memories in a speciously present tense: "Me breathing booze at her,/She leaning...." In the penultimate paragraph, we leap forward in time, away from the

memories and away from the action of the first line. The maid's taking the geranium out postdates Roethke's taking the geranium out. In the concluding lines, we are as near the present as we will get, so near in fact, that the "was" of the last line could almost be in the present tense, could almost be "am." As the tone of the poem indicates, the owner of the geranium still feels strongly for "her." Isolating the narrative line of Roethke's "The Geranium," as I have done here, by no means exhausts the poem's complexities. That is not the point or my intention. Looking for a narrative line in a poem, however, can give a student a place to start and a way to proceed methodically.

Even when a poem appears merely associative in structure, searching out the narrative line can be helpful. At first sight (and even at second sight), "The Track," a poem by the contemporary American poet, W. S. Merwin, may seem especially opaque:

> To see that an ancestor has reappeared
> as the print of a paw
> in a worn brick
> changes what you believe you are
> and where you imagine you are going
> before the clay sets
>
> and what you think might follow you
>
> over the floors
> of the oven
>
> the empty palace
> with its many wings
> its lighted stairs
> its deep windows
> its seasons
> and its white sound
> still soft underfoot
>
> and when

W. S. Merwin, *Writings to an Unfinished Accompaniment* (New York: Atheneum, 1976), 109.

If we ask, *What happens here?*, however, and look for a narrative line, the poem can reveal itself gradually. Merwin has made the connectives deliberately tenuous (time passes, in the process, and

vertigo intervenes) but the unfolding narrative of the poem might be phrased in an abbreviated version of the poem's sentence: "To see that an ancestor has reappeared/. . . changes what you believe you are/ and where you imagine you are going/. . . and what you think might follow you/. . . and when." Disengaging this sentence from the poem points up the fact that, appropriately, the most important word here is the verb "changes."

Not all poems are so sneaky, however, and not all poems have narrative lines. Theodore Roethke's "Root Cellar," for example, is not structured by the sequence of events but by the sequence of images:

> Nothing would sleep in that cellar, dank as a ditch,
> Bulbs broke out of boxes hunting for chinks in the dark,
> Shoots dangled and drooped,
> Lolling obscenely from mildewed crates,
> Hung down long yellow evil necks, like tropical snakes.
> And what a congress of stinks! —
> Roots ripe as old bait,
> Pulpy stems, rank, silo-rich,
> Leaf-mold, manure, lime, piled against slippery planks.
> Nothing would give up life:
> Even the dirt kept breathing a small breath.
>
> (Roethke, 38.)

Framed as they are by two conditional phrases, "Nothing would sleep . . ." and "Nothing would give up life . . . ," the images within the poem are, in a sense, simultaneous. Space, not time, is Roethke's structuring principle in "Root Cellar." At the outset of the poem, the speaker's eyes (and our eyes as readers) are fixed on the upper portions of the cellar. We see bulbs "hunting for chinks" in the walls. Then (because simultaneity in language is always only apparent, never possible), our eyes are directed downward by arrested motion of "dangled" and "drooped" shoots and by "long yellow evil necks" "hung down." We then see "roots" and "stems" on "slippery planks" spread on the floor. In the last line, our eyes have moved still further down, to the floor itself, to the dirt so closely we can perceive its breathing. In the process of reading, we have sensed Roethke's root cellar from top to bottom. Elsewhere in his famous Greenhouse poems, incidentally, Roethke uses other detectable structuring devices drawn from classical rhetoric. Students will recognize in "Cuttings" and "Flower Dump" a paradigm of paragraph organization. In those poems, Roethke proceeds

from the general to the particular. In "Forcing House," Roethke reverses the procedure: the many, the "vines," "scums," "mildews," and "great cannas" are eventually collected, by the end of the poem, into the one, the massive upwelling of "live heat."

As I have noted, students will readily understand how narration and description are structuring devices. The third device I want to point out will require some explanation, however. Since the third device, the "clustering of diction," lends itself especially to the inductive approach, it is appropriate to begin with an example, Edwin Arlington Robinson's poem, "Richard Cory":

> Whenever Richard Cory went down town,
> We people on the pavement looked at him:
> He was a gentleman from sole to crown,
> Clean favored, and imperially slim.
>
> And he was always quietly arrayed,
> And he was always human when he talked;
> But still he fluttered pulses when he said,
> "Good-morning," and he glittered when he walked.
>
> And he was rich — yes, richer than a king —
> And admirably schooled in every grace:
> In fine, we thought that he was everything
> To make us wish that we were in his place.
>
> So on we worked, and waited for the light,
> And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;
> And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,
> Went home and put a bullet through his head.
>
> in *Modern American Poetry,* ed. Louis Untermeyer (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964), 118.

"Richard Cory" tells a story, it should be noted, but we need to look for more than the narrative line. That can be shown by evaluating this prose paraphrase: "One summer night, a rich and handsome gentleman named Richard Cory, who was envied by many people, shot himself to death." The paraphrase tells the tale, but a great deal has been lost. What has been lost, Robert Frost might say, is simply the poem itself. We need to restore that. In order to do so, we might ask, How is Richard Cory characterized? What words or phrases in the poem describe him? Is it easy to collect the evidence: Cory is described as "clean favored," "imperially

slim," "quietly arrayed," "richer than a king," "schooled in every grace," and so forth. In short, Cory is presented in terms appropriate for a king or even a god. Such terms work together to create a portrait of Cory which is more than the sum of the parts. We need only try to replace some of the words with apparent synonyms like "good-looking," "thin," "nicely dressed," "wealthy," and well-educated" to see how dependent that image is upon its interlocking parts. Perhaps the most interesting such instance is the phrase "in fine." Now archaic, the words mean "in brief" or "in summation." "Fineness" in the sense of "quality" is not involved in the idiom's meaning at all, but Robinson actually squeezes that suggestion into the words because he has surrounded them with an aristocratic context.

After collecting the words and phrases which contribute to the image of Cory, we find that much language remains. How is what remains different from the network which creates the patrician Cory? By applying the same inductive method, we can find a second and poorer "family" of words. The others in the poem, the "we" who speak, are associated with terms like "pavement," "work," "meat," and "bread." Their words denote classes of things, not individual things within classes. Their language for themselves is demotic, denotative, and plain while the language they use for Cory is regal and laden with favorable connotations. The distinction in class and social status, then, which itself is an important part of the poem, is reinforced by the distinction between dictions which appears in the poem.

In collecting descriptive language thus far in "Richard Cory," we have concentrated on the adjectives and nouns. We can go further, for it is instructive to look also at the way Robinson employs verbs. Though Cory is presented as an extraordinary person, as we have seen, in fact he does very ordinary things. The verbs that describe his behavior ("went," "walked," "talked") are words from the pavement. Throughout the poem, then, Robinson is subtly reinforcing with his verbs what he will make most pointed in the conclusion: in the important respects, Robinson suggests, all persons are the same. Robinson shocks us into that conclusion, for to which of the two "families" of diction do the last two lines belong? Cory's suicide is presented in the language of the pavement, interestingly. His fall from life to death is signaled also by his demotion from the aristocratic diction to the language of the common man. In the last word of the last line, Cory's "crown" becomes a "head."

In order to see further into "Richard Cory," we had to go beyond the narrative of the poem and analyze characterization. In

order to understand W. S. Merwin's challenging poem, "The Drunk In The Furnace," we need to go beyond both narrative and characterization. We need to establish the point-of-view of the speaker of the poem.

> For a good decade
> The furnace stood in the naked gully, fireless
> And vacant as any hat. Then when it was
> No more to them than a hulking black fossil
> To erode unnoticed with the rest of the junk-hill
> By the poisonous creek, and rapidly to be added
> To their ignorance,
>
> They were afterwards astonished
> To confirm, one morning, a twist of smoke like a pale
> Resurrection, staggering out of its chewed hole,
> And to remark then other tokens that someone,
> Cosily bolted behind the eye-holed iron
> Door of the drafty burner, had there established
> His bad castle.
>
> Where he gets his spirits
> It's a mystery. But the stuff keeps him musical:
> Hammer-and-anvilling with poker and bottle
> To his jugged bellowings, till the last groaning clang
> As he collapses onto the rioting
> Springs of a litter of car-seats ranged on the grates,
> To sleep like an iron pig.
>
> In their tar-paper church
> On a text about stoke-holes that are sated never
> Their Reverend lingers. They nod and hate trespassers.
> When the furnace wakes, though, all afternoon
> Their witless offspring flock like piped rats to its siren
> Crescendo, and agape on the crumbling ridge
> Stand in a row and learn.
>
> W. S. Merwin, *The First Four Books of Poems* (New York: Atheneum, 1975), 261.

As in "Richard Cory," there are characters in Merwin's poem, but we meet neither the drunk and his flock nor the Reverend and his congregation early in the poem. We hear of a "them" and a "someone," both mysterious, in stanzas 1 and 2, but these stanzas func-

tion primarily to create a context, a dramatic setting. We can proceed inductively, as we did in "Richard Cory," and collect the words which establish the setting. Stanza 1, for example, depicts a desolate landscape with words that convey impressions of decay: "naked gully," "fireless," "vacant," "fossil," "erode unnoticed," "junk-hill," "ignorance." To contrast with the desolation and decay of the naked gully, stanza 2 presents a presence both solid and somehow miraculous: the drunk has "established" a "castle" in which he lives "cosily," and observers are "astonished" to "confirm" indications of this strange "resurrection." Stanza 3 reiterates the impression conveyed in stanza 2. Merwin intensifies the image of the drunk as magical figure because there is "mystery" about the origin of his "spirits." (These "spirits," of course, suggest both the drunk's vitality and his alcohol.)

In stanza 4, Merwin describes a ramshackle church where a preacher sermonizes about the bottomless folly of mankind. The furnace "stoke-holes" he refers to are in hell, and they are fed human fuel. Apparently, the drunk is perceived by the churchgoers as one of these hated "trespassers," but the children of the churchgoers are drawn to him. Merwin emphasizes the power to attract which the drunk exerts by likening the children first to sheep, then to the rats piped by the Pied Piper of Hamelin, and then to those lured onto rocks by the songs of sirens. As their parents are attentive to the remarks of the Reverend, so the children attend to the performance of the drunk. The children stand "agape" and "learn." (Because Merwin has used specifically religious language throughout the poem, "confirm," "resurrection," and so forth, it is not far-fetched to notice in "agape" the transliteration of the Greek word "agapé," the highest form of Christian love, to be distinguished from "eros.")

What do the children learn? Is the drunk their Reverend, their preacher? There are indications to support that view. One could argue that the drunk and the Reverend are alternatives, are opposites, each speaking to correlative congregations, but we need to notice more carefully Merwin's tone, his point-of-view, as indicated by his choice of diction. Though "musical," the drunk degenerates eventually to a "bellowing," a "groaning," and he "collapses onto the rioting . . . litter" and sleeps. The "iron pig" he is likened to suggests at once the products of the blast furnace, pigs of iron, and the rigidity of his alcoholic stupor. In addition, the drunk's is a "bad castle." His "flock," too, is "witless" and they stand on a "crumbling ridge." Thus, Merwin does not depict the drunk positively or as an alternative to the severe Reverend.

Unlike Robinson who aligns himself with the "people on the pavement," and thus becomes indistinguishable from their voice, Merwin distances himself from the characters in his poem. The contrast he establishes between drunk and Reverend is an illusory one, therefore. Neither merits his allegiance. He sees both drunk and Reverend, both children and congregation, in essentially the same ironic light. By so doing, he himself becomes the most intriguing character in the poem.

Like other interpretations, ones I have suggested are not final. Even a "standard interpretation" must pass a continuous test. Students need to see that and be brought in as participants in the ongoing interpretive procedure. Instilling confidence in them that they are up to the task is an important first step; it can be taken by offering intelligible means which dramatize that constructing an interpretation is a matter of method, not mystery. The several structures that I have emphasized, narration, description, and diction, can function as such tools, but they do not exhaust the possibilities. They are easy to see, however, easy to use, and they can give students access to very many poems, and to very many kinds of writing for that matter, including (though that is another story) their own.

Bringing the Burger to Saigon

Sue Howell
Carbondale Community High School

"Thinking is very big now," remarked a friend of mine who had noticed the current availability of grant money for proposals dealing with thinking skills. We've suddenly discovered that our students have trouble thinking. Drawing inferences. Analyzing data. Making judgments. And with the glacial inevitability that characterizes the response to "new" ideas in education, books and articles on thinking skills are beginning to appear, workshops are offered, news articles are written. And we writing teachers, who have been insisting in recent years that writing is thinking, are feeling some pressure to make good our implied promises.

Everybody thinks, but what we want our students to do is critical thinking. We want them to make judgments about a phenomenon based on logical analysis of data. Critical thinking requires setting aside preconceptions, challenging existing assumptions, and looking at the phenomenon objectively. To engage in

critical thinking is to arrange and rearrange data (sense-data, existing cognitive structures, etc.) so that one sees the phenomenon from different perspectives and perhaps in a new way. Students who rush to judgment without fully investigating a phenomenon are, I believe, often being asked to think about things about which they know very little. Every student in my classes has an opinion on abortion, the death penalty, and what we should do about the Soviets, an opinion generally based on very little knowledge. Of course, it would be possible to engage them in heated discussion and then send them to the library for evidence to support or refute a particular position. But this approach often emphasizes the product at the expense of the process. And in order for intellectual skills to be transferable, the students must become aware of the process. I developed a writing assignment which I hoped would help students reach this awareness. I also wanted to encourage divergent thinking by having the students look at a phenomenon from multiple perspectives.

One morning (the class meets at 9:30) I arranged for two students in a senior class to bring to class a Whopper, Jr., a typical fast-food concoction composed of burger, bun, lettuce, pickle, "special sauce," etc., purchased at a student hangout across the street (yes, you can get a hamburger at 9:15 a.m.).[1] I told the class that we were going to do a writing exercise and, after passing the burger around, asked them to respond to a series of questions. Although I wrote along with the class, I am not including any of my responses. The sample responses have not been edited.

I. What can you tell me about this burger, objectively, simply from close observation?

It looks edible

Settled on the lower bun is a hamburger patty, presumably beef

Pieces of lettuce, of approximate size 1cm², are tossed on and attached to the mayo

The bun itself, flattened slightly from what I assume was its original puffed-disk shape

A moist piece of bun beneath a cold, flat patty of meat. The top of the bun is smooth, with sesame seeds glued here and there

Ketchup oozing onto the side of the box . . . lettuce is long white shiny slimy. . . . Bun holds to my fingerprints for a long time

In this first set of responses, the students are fighting their subjective reactions to the burger. Expressive language creeps in. But they defend themselves, sometimes with humor, sometimes by assuming a pseudo-scientific attitude. They show a strong resistance to advertisers' blandishments in their ability to see the burger as it is; still, if the burger were not there in front of them the descriptions would probably be quite different. The physical presence of the burger reduces the power of culturally determined preconceptions. The students are able to get some distance on a cultural artifact. Observation of this sort is an important first step; it separates the figure from the ground and prepares the way for analysis. When we know what something is, we can begin to think about what it means.

II. What logical assumptions can you make about the burger?

the burger was in a more edible state before our period of observation

the burger juices have seeped into the bun by now

prefabricated . . . produced very quickly, systematically nearly identical to all other whopper jr.'s. Carefully planned construction (in B.K.'s laboratories) edible — won't really cause any disease

ketchup and mayonnaise used most likely came from a large bottle which had been made in a factory, shipped to . . . distributors

money had to be paid for it

It was bought and sold with the idea that it would be eaten

In answer to this question, a number of students (the first two in this set of responses, for example) continued to focus on the burger at hand (or in view). But they are moving from the seen to the not-seen, a form of generalization. Other students seek out structural invariants and begin to place the burger in a larger con-

text. Even so, they haven't lost their hold on the reality of the burger. This question helps the students distinguish between data and conclusion, a distinction that is often lost in hastily thought out analytical or argumentative papers.

III. What is your subjective reaction to the burger?

It is a mess

ghastly

The overall reaction to the burger would be to throw it out

Guilt for eating that piece of trash which is fattening instead of something healthy

this catches me at a time when I am not very hungry; so my desire or craving for this burger is minimal. However, I don't think I would, given the choice of something else, eat this burger. The fact that this burger has no real identity causes me to lose all respect for it

it would be sort of good to eat (sorry, fellas, but . . .)

It smells like heaven on a microwave shelf to the olfactory senses of the body that missed breakfast. The mushy buns, mayo, moderately warm burger look like they'd melt on the palate, and stick there. Ah, for a slug of chemically sweetened water to wash the Whopper down

One of the reasons that I didn't start with this question was that I wanted a (relatively) clear distinction between the subjective and the objective, which is easier to achieve if you've started with cold-eyed observation. In order to write analytically, students must be aware of the difference between their own personal responses and what might be accepted as evidence in a logically reasoned argument. It is also true that concept formation depends on the interaction between the subjective and the objective — an interaction that the students should be made aware of. In this case, the burger clearly stimulated diverse reactions, and the students wrote freely and idiosyncratically.

IV. What role have burgers played in your life?

They served as a reward for good behavior in my childhood

fast food burgers used to be a delicacy, a treat for the child, myself who at home was faced with sauerkraut and brussels sprouts with hollandaise sauce

I also have progressed from the hamburger-fed and loving child at steak cookouts to another mouth in the steak-eating legions

a cheap source of food on band and speech trips

In my high school career . . . burgers have become more and more essential to my daily existence

they have been an excuse to go out

til 2:00 am you can get food

In Germany they reminded me of home

This question is a continuation of the process initiated by the previous question. The students continue to look at the burger from a personal perspective. But the dimension of time is added as they evaluate their changing perceptions of the burger. They also place the burger in a social context, a context determined by their own social relations.

V. What are the social, cultural, and economic implications of this burger?

How many romances have been started or broken up in the presence of such burgers

The burger empire has spread far and wide

They even have McDonald's in Paris

Burger King and McDonald's have made lots of money and now have even political influence

Ronnie and Nancy should serve one to the Queen on her next visit . . . represents the rat-race . . . is America's sell-out of relaxation and enjoying food. It's served fast, made fast, eaten fast

Freedom for the energy and time engulfing trap of gourmet cooking, menu-planning. It is small, relatively inexpensive, and satisfying on the physical level. Is this what society wants out of life today? . . . The women's movement . . . . Out of the kitchen and into the streets

Burgers . . . helped lead the way in establishing fast food, destroying the diner, establishing coast to coast chains and commercials, created thousands of jobs and partly created its own market. It helped unify the country in a land where every town had its burgers and gas brands in common, and with network television — created and pioneered the mass market. They've corrupted and conquered the western world — too bad they only taste pretty good

is it necessary for the burger to exist?

The present day Whopper Jr. is beyond the economic power of the unemployed proletariat

Does the use of this burger as an object for a number of affluent teens to scribble words about have any effect on the moral balance of the universe (having in mind the millions of starving in the world)?

After responding to the first four questions, the students are ready for this one. Because they have taken a close look at the burger, inside and out, they can begin to treat the burger in a larger context. Their responses not only extend the generalizations implied in the earlier responses, but reflect high-level thinking skills — analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. The format, of course, allows the students to associate freely without the constraints of a formal structure. But there is structure in the ideas. I believe that this is due to the fact that the students caught and held a concrete reality as they integrated it into their own experience, moving from the seen to the unseen, from the specific to the general, from the concrete to the abstract.

That's as far as we went with the burger. Of course, this exercise could spin off research papers on "The Nutritional Value of Fast

Food" or "Fast Food and the American Family." But in this case, I was less interested in the content than the process. I wanted to show the students how they could take something they knew quite well and use it as a way to get to rather complex generalizations and syntheses. The initial isolation of the burger from its accustomed context helped the students see the burger in a new way, which opened up possibilities for inferences and hypotheses. The alternation of subjective and objective responses helped the students to arrive at new syntheses. Throughout, the "surprise" nature of the exercise encouraged divergent thinking. And rather than being asked to draw immediate conclusions, the students suspended judgment as they looked at the burger from many angles.

When we discussed the responses in class, the students became more aware of the thought processes they had followed. The burger became a metaphor for a phenomenon to be probed, especially the concrete, experiential aspects of that phenomenon. "Get back to the burger," I would say when I wanted them to find something in their own experience to use as a means of discovery. And the burger itself took on new meanings. When we discussed *Heart of Darkness*, the meaning of colonialism became clearer with a shift in context. What was America doing in Vietnam? Bringing the burger to Saigon. The burger is the essential concrete reality through which we begin to understand other realities.

Notes

[1] Although the heuristic is mine, I got the burger idea from Ira Shor, *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life* (Boston: South End Press, 1980). Reviewed in *College English*, 43 (1981), 824-838.

Listing and Clustering: A Strategy for Teaching Categorizing

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In taking students step-by-step through the process of writing analyses several problems ordinarily arise immediately. One is finding a successful topic and another is acquiring enough information about the topic to furnish material for a penetrating analysis. These problems are really not hard to solve if the teacher provides

exercises in critical thinking. Students can be made to see that there are bundles of experiences sitting before them, and they simply have to figure a way to extract those experiences which can be worked with. The teacher has to trigger some responses and get them recorded.

Teaching students to handle subordination effectively can be done through a system I've used which is basically a controlled form of show-and-tell. By subordination I mean breaking down ideas into subsets, being able to form precise sentences which identify those subsets accurately, and making connections between the subsets which reveal their relatedness. I select a topic and then I ask every student in the room to respond with a remembrance based on that topic. From their seats students recite their remembrances and the rest of the class writes them down, reducing each one to a summary.

To elicit a relatively narrow response and to make certain that everyone has something specific to contribute, I pick a topic which assures a common experience. Injuries might be one. Everyone has been injured at one time or other, and furthermore the memory is likely to be vivid. The descriptions, therefore, are likely to be graphic. Once the class gets started the members usually enjoy reciting.

"How many of you have ever broken any bones?"

"Have you ever had to get stitches?"

Before the instructor can say, "Tell us about it," students are likely to be telling about the injury already, animatedly.

The procedure we follow in class is simple: each student records *in a single sentence* the essence of each respective story. The recitations are numbered consecutively so that we can later refer to the anecdotes by number. Student A may start off, "I once rode my bike down into a ravine and flipped over the handlebars. I landed on my jaw and broke off two teeth." The instructor may then seek further clarification and expansion: "Which teeth? How long ago was it, and where exactly did this take place? Why did you go down that steep incline?" Once enough information has been obtained, the rest of the students write a capsule version of the incident.

The recitation-recording session may take several days. It is an enjoyable activity. Even the writing isn't difficult; just re-create the information, "in your own words." If I wish I may take a day's papers from the students and spotcheck their descriptions, seeing how good they are at condensing the information, making sure they

recorded the essential details, checking on spelling and punctuation, and so on.

If this is a class which needs basic work in composing I will myself sometimes summarize a recited experience and then dictate a model sentence. With a class that is particularly deficient in writing skills, I may even supply a sentence for every second recitation. That way students have an immediate model for each sentence of their own.

I encourage students to ask for help at the time they are composing, whether it be spelling, punctuating, choosing the exact words, or making sentence sense: that is, using verbal logic. In this way I can help in the composing process when the need is immediate. After we have thirty or so sentences I then ask the students to scan their sentences to discover groupings, patterns of similarity in the numbered mini-reports. (Some students will want to recite twice and if I see a value in it I let them.)

With a common focal point such as personal injuries, some stark patterns will be evident at once. Some of the injuries will have occurred in the home, for example, others on playgrounds, others at camp, some at school. For purposes of initial grouping, therefore, descriptions of injuries could be clustered according to *where* they happened. Also, some injuries would have been suffered upon *objects* such as vehicles, sports equipment, or household tools. Another way to group the items then would be according to the device upon which they occurred or that caused the harm.

I try, however, to make students aware that such groupings are purely arbitrary and have only the single easily identified feature in common. "Many people from this class have received injuries" would be a logical guide or lead sentence. If they were to structure an article based on injuries suffered by classmates, such a grouping by time, place, season of the year, age of the wounded or even the kind of injury (such as split lips, broken wrists, or concussions) would result in a rather dry and flaccid report.

Occasionally I will settle for "dry and flaccid," with inexperienced writers, because I want them to practice writing sentences which designate the groupings. This step in writing category sentences is difficult for students who have had little conscious practice. Writing category sentences of this kind forces students to generate language which establishes connections between discreet items of data. This *connecting* system is at the heart of all critical thinking and intelligent composing, it seems to me. It is where writing becomes a manifestation of thinking. One could call it a writing fundamental.

At first then, I settle for simple factual generalities: "A couple of people got their skulls cracked. Several folks had to have stitches. A few kids had broken bones." I will at least insist that the groupings themselves have a common element, in this case *kinds* of injuries. Students will see that ideas such as (1) some students got to ride an ambulance, and (2) a few kids were hurt by family members, and (3) a couple got injured while on vacation, and (4) several were wounded because they took foolish chances, all are incongruous because there is no commonality about their being placed together. That is, none of these general statements has a clear relationship to its preceding or succeeding statement. There is nothing *wrong* with any of the above assertions, but they do not represent patterns in the data, *as they are presently stated*.

Sentence number four above does hold a clue to a *system* for organizing data which would clearly demonstrate reflective thought; that is, it deals with causal factors of the injuries. Clustering causes about the injuries might lead to some conclusions about the nature of them. Certain identifiable things may precipitate "accidents."

It is useful to conduct a class discussion about how a newspaper might handle an article based upon these thirty or so recorded anecdotes. The newspaper would probably feature the severe injuries, highlighting the most extensive, the goriest, and those with permanently damaging results. Students can indeed be asked to write such an article.

A feature essay in a magazine, on the other hand, might instead highlight the lessons learned, the dangers of unpreparedness, or the need for first aid training. Each of these "angles" would dictate the nature of the groupings. In each case some of the anecdotes would likely need expanding and some might need condensing. Real sentences could actually be combined (instead of sentences from a workbook). Some injuries might even be reduced to just a listing, depending on the focus of the article.

Students could make an outline for a composition under any of the above groupings by writing a lead sentence and the sentences which identfy the sub-categories. They need not even write the finished article. I can stop the procedure at any point, depending upon how the students can best benefit. With sophisticated writers, however, I am inclined to dwell upon two aspects of this operation which demand intelligence and some degree of perception. To organize the data by *severity* of injuries means that writers must make personal judgments and distinctions about that data. The writers must next decide how they want to *order* their composition. Do they want to present the most bizarre injury first and then

trail off to a listing of cuts and bruises? Or, do they want to select a few choice spectacular ones and ignore the remainder?

My ultimate goal will actually be to have students learn that if they organize the material on injuries according to *reasons for* those injuries, they are quite likely to arrive at conclusions that only a probing analysis of the data would reveal. They might find, for instance, that youthful tendencies toward combativeness, particularly family warfare, can be harmful. Also, they may find: that hazards often lurk in unlikely places; that young people frequently mishandle toys, bikes, and sleds; that showing off or trying to stretch oneself beyond known abilities can be painful; or that practical jokes sometimes backfire. If students can come to these conclusions and state those conclusions accurately, then they will have practiced some of the major steps in thoughtful composing, namely taking data and making sense of it. Whenever I expect students to come up with a finished product, I allow class time for them to reinterview selected classmates so that they can expand anecdotes in their composing.

Many topics lend themselves to this group recitation-recording-and-idea-clustering. I have tried favorite foods, names of streets (this reveals a great deal about a community), pet peeves, teenage jobs, major accomplishments, a memorable experience in a distant locale, a frustrating vacation, and (the most productive of all) an embarrassing moment.

This method of stimulating students to write in thoughtful, connected sequences may seem unduly simplistic. That in truth is its principal benefit. The process is simple but the product can be quite complex. It is almost like taking students by the hand and leading them to the promised land of intellectual synthesis.

Using Original Surveys to Promote Thinking in Library Research Projects

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Some high school students and many college freshmen in composition courses are required to develop strategies for discovering library sources and for writing about them. In expressing a hope — if not an assumption — of many composition teachers, Charles

Bazerman writes that library research enables students to become intellectually involved with a subject:

> Throughout this [research] process, it is you [the student] who decides what materials you need, discovers the connections between different pieces of information, evaluates the information, frames the questions you will answer, and comes to original conclusions. (234)

If this analysis is accurate, then some portions of the library research report should reflect the student's own thoughts.

In my teaching experience, however, library research reports seldom exhibit students' inferences. The body of such a paper, for instance, may only string together paraphrased, summarized, and quoted information. Final sections of papers often present merely a summary of a preceding discussion, and many students do not show how their work could lead to additional inquiry.

In this essay, I will suggest how we as teachers may unwittingly limit students' thinking because of our notions about the written product. Then, I will describe an instructional strategy that I have successfully used to help high school seniors write papers that express conclusions. I believe this approach could also encourage thinking in college composition.

Unintentionally Restricting Thought in Library Research Papers

In my opinion, certain expectations which teachers hold for the product of writing limit students' thinking or at least do not encourage it. A traditional view of composition is that it should follow a deductive pattern: a thesis presents a general idea developed in the paper's body, and in the paragraphs of the body, topic sentences express ideas developed through explanation and example. Such influential rhetoricians as Richard E. Young and Alton L. Becker echo many textbooks by observing the common occurrence of deductive structure in paragraphs. They label this pattern "TRI (topic-restriction-illustration)" (Tate and Corbett, 143). I contend, however, that when the deductive model governs paragraphs of a paper's body, students are not led to generalize about specific facts (inductive reasoning). Let me illustrate this problem.

In papers based on library research, the deductive pattern controls the use of source material and permits students to write with minimal thinking. Students learn, for example, that direct quotations should support generalizations and explanations expressed in their own words. The difficulty here is that students may seek

material only to support their previous thinking or even substitute for it. That is, students may write papers with no more intellectual involvement than determining a coherent arrangement for parroted thought.

A Rationale and a Strategy for Promoting Inductive Thinking

To encourage thoughtful writing in a library research paper, I require citations of elementary statistical information and discussion of its implications. And to ensure the authenticity of inferences, I have students develop original data by designing written questionnaires, reporting the findings, and drawing conclusions from those findings.

The college-bound seniors I teach write a library research paper that includes a component based on data developed through surveys. The overall paper concerns analyzing a problem and arguing for action to solve that problem. Near the completion of the library research phase, students devise three questions pertaining to a cause of the problem, a consequence of it, or a solution to it. These questions are ones for which students would truly like to learn the views of their peers. Since preparing effective questions is a challenge, I use small-group discussions of rough draft questions to improve them. Despite these measures, I find that many students also need individual help from me in order to invent suitable questions and phrase them clearly.

In constructing their questionnaires, students instruct respondents to mark which of two groups they as survey participants belong to. Since I hand out the questionnaire to all of my other classes, respondents are either juniors or seniors. A classification of respondents enables the researching student to point out similarities and differences in the findings of the groups. Such comparison adds interest in the results. (At the level of higher education, a useful classification system might be based on students' preferences for major fields, such as the humanities or science and technology.)

In preparing the questionnaire, students need to write a short paragraph to introduce respondents to the subject of the survey. For simplicity I stress that each question be answered yes or no. Surveys exclude lines for open-ended comments since that type of information is difficult to analyze and report. (The appendix offers a sample of a student's questionnaire.)

The cycle of preparing surveys and receiving responses broadens students' rhetorical experience. After arranging for duplication, I distribute surveys to students in all my other classes. For

any unclear question, I instruct respondents to point out the problem in writing but not to mark yes or no. When I return the completed surveys, the students who wrote the questions are eager to see the replies and sometimes boisterous in their reaction to the written comments on unclear questions. Some students are surprised to find that their peers as well as their English teacher see difficulties in the meaning of their sentences.

Tabulating and Reporting Findings

For each question, students construct a table to present their findings and to serve as a basis for discussion. In preparing a table for a particular question, students calculate the percentage marking yes, then no. Even for college-bound seniors I remind them that percentages are determined by dividing the number answering yes, then no, by the total number of respondents to a given question. To help students understand table format, I give them a sample table as illustrated by the one that follows. This table presents data for one of the questions of the sample questionnaire in the appendix.

Sample Table

Awareness of Schizophrenic Behavior

		Would you be able to describe the type of behavior a schizophrenic exhibits?	
Type of Class	Number Responding	Yes %	No %
English 6	37	30	70
English 7	30	70	30
Total	67		

Once tables have been completed, I have students use at least two of them in their library research reports. Students therefore must decide on appropriate places in the paper's organization to include the tables, briefly introduce them, and discuss their findings. This requirement affords experience similar to that of employees who write on the job and who must present certain information to satisfy a reader.

Improved Thinking Through Revision

Tables, of course, aid the teacher in judging how well students discuss factual information. Frequently, revision is necessary for

students to correct such problems as inadequate transitions, poor summary of the table's data, and incomplete development of conclusions.

The following passages illustrate how revising strengthens the link between the primary source information of a table and the secondary source material that precedes the incorporation of a table.

student's original version:

The following table illustrates how aware students are about the symptoms of schizophrenia [symptoms were described in the previous section]. The table is based upon a questionnaire given to English 6 and English 7 students who were asked to answer yes or no to whether or not they would be able to describe the type of behavior a schizophrenic exhibits.

revised version:

Because schizophrenia is the most common type of mental illness, students need to become more aware of its symptoms in case they are exposed to this illness in the future. For example, people who are familiar with the disease may be able to recognize a friend or loved one who shows signs of a mental disorder and take an affirmative step in helping them get treatment. The following table is based upon a questionnaire.

Amy Cihla, student

The first passage below, which immediately followed a table concerning a different subject, omitted a summary of the findings and then presented weakly developed conclusions:

The result of this question ["Do you think of a manager as being a male?"] was not as I expected. The non-college-bound students were more open minded about being managers than the college-bound students. Females are assumed to be weaker, more passive, and more dependent in the eyes of the public.

By responding to my critique, the student strengthened the discussion of the table:

Seventy-six percent of the non-college-bound students responded "no." The college-bound students are more prejudiced by sixteen percent against females being managers than the non-college-bound students. The result of this question was not as I expected. I thought the students with less edu-

cational background tend to be more prejudiced against females and assume that women are weaker, more passive, and more dependent than males.

Janice Hanerhoff, student

In the data and the discussion of it, teachers may discover and point out implications to get students to think further about their subjects. For example, the passage just cited ought to lead the student to consider why the non-college-bound juniors showed somewhat less sexist stereotyping of managers than the college-bound seniors did. Of course, students need to consider whether their findings are representative of the groups surveyed.

My experience suggests that a process of using original data in library research and composition increases students' involvement with their subject as well as their experience with communicative purpose and a reading audience. And revising based on teacher response ensures that students expand their thinking. My success in this approach leads me to believe that teachers of other subjects could stimulate learning by designing projects in which students generate facts and interpret them in writing.

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Appendix

Sample Student Questionnaire

Directions: Please check the level of English which you are currently enrolled in:

_____ English 6
_____ English 7

Introduction: Schizophrenia is a severe mental illness in which the patient is unable to live a normal life. I have been studying schizophrenia for a research paper, and the answers you choose to the following questions will better inform me about how you see the subject of mental illness.

1. Would you be able to describe the type of behavior a schizophrenic exhibits?

Check one: _____ yes _____ no

2. If you felt that you had a need to go to a psychiatrist or psychologist, would you be willing to go to one?
Check one: _____ yes _____ no

3. Would you be afraid or uncomfortable to talk to or be with a person who has had a history of mental disturbance?
Check one: _____ yes _____ no

Cognitive Strategies to Use with Basic Writers

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Jerome Bruner (1973) asserted, "At its best a learning episode reflects what has gone before it and permits one to generalize beyond it" (p. 421). He was reflecting the attitude of cognitive psychologists who suggest that learning occurs through a process of fitting experience to what we know and adjusting what we know to fit each new experience. Many writing theorists, especially those associated with "Writing as a Way of Knowing" or "Writing as a Mode of Thinking," have adopted this cognitive explanation. These theorists see writing as an experience through which one discovers knowledge or develops ways of thinking. The concept is something like a vortex with information flowing in and out continuously. Writing and knowing become reciprocal experiences — we need to think to write, but we discover what we think in the process of writing.

In Developmental education, Piaget provides one link between cognition and language so that his ideas have supplied one basis for teaching Basic Writing. Piaget divided mental growth into three sequential stages. The first, sensori-motor, leads to later stages. Once the child moves beyond concrete objects to see relationships and classifications not directly tied to the concrete, she has reached the second stage of concrete operations. Instead of being bound to the concrete, the third stage — formal thought — allows the child to "see" reality in terms of the "imagined or deduced" (1969, p. 149). Essential, then, for learning is understanding. Piaget makes another important point about development in his discussion of egocentricity. A child's logic according to Piaget (1952) is egocentric. What this means is that the child reasons intuitively; he does not make his reasoning explicit; he leaps from

premise to conclusion; he uses personal and visual schemas; and he is influenced by judgments of value (pp. 46-47). Once a child thinks as an adult (reaches the formal thought stage), her reasoning becomes what Piaget terms "communicated intelligence": she is more deductive, using less analogy; she emphasizes proof; she eliminates visual schemas; her personal value judgments give way to collective ones.

Piaget's stages suggest that college students must be able to think at the third stage and must become less egocentric in order to do college level writing. A FIPSE supported project in Georgia assumes that college students in developmental English classes enter at stage one or two, and the semester is spent helping students experience stage two and go on to stage three. An example of their approach is an assignment in classification when students bring containers to class and then classify all the containers. The writing assignment following this in-class work is to classify any to the bumper stickers. This assignment, therefore, involves readevelop a generalization about the interests of Atlantans according to the bumper stickers. This assignment, therefore, involves reasoning from specific to general and back again — or playing the abstraction ladder. The assignment also attempts to move the student beyond the egocentric to a more impersonal view by requiring that the student use someone else's details — not his own bumper stickers.

Basic Writing researchers acknowledge that moving from general to specific and back again or abstracting is usually a deficiency among Basic Writers (Shaughnessy, 1977; Troyka, 1982; Lunsford, 1983). The source of this deficiency may be cognitive immaturity, or as Janice Hays (1982) suggests, it may also result from environment and experience. Mitchell and Taylor as well as W. C. Snipes (1976) suggest that B. W.'s lack of experience means they do not know the way to respond to academic writing situations and frequently are unaware of the choices available to them. Joseph Williams speaking to the Reasoning and Higher Order Thinking Institute at the University of Chicago last May mentioned this same problem for college writers. Because they are entering a new writing situation, Williams believes students have difficulty mastering the assignments and thus appear to have lost skills they still actually have.

Whatever the reason, writing teachers know that their students, especially developmental writers — Basic Writers — have difficulty playing the abstraction ladder. If students are having trouble because they are at Piaget's stage one or two, or if their difficulty

results from a new situation, we need to help them develop the skills necessary to succeed in our developmental classes and to go on to be successful college graduates. And this also means we have to help them move from personal, egocentric writing to more impersonal writing. One way to accomplish this rather ambitious goal is to provide experiences in the classroom with gradually more impersonal essay assignments demanding movement on the abstraction ladder. The approach that I will describe begins with three assumptions:

1. Basic Writers need to deal with concrete topics first and move on to see relationships before we can expect them to reach the formal thought stage.
2. Basic Writers, because they are egocentric, need to progress to more and more impersonal writing.
3. Basic Writers can learn to play the abstraction ladder, if they are given assignments that help them do this.

My students begin the semester by interviewing one other person in class. In addition to such questions as "What is your major?" and "Where did you go to high school?" all of the students must ask these questions:

1. Do you work? Where? What do you like or dislike about your job?
2. What is your favorite music? Who are your favorite performers? Why?
3. What do you do in your spare time?
4. What do you plan to be doing in ten years?
5. What would you do with $1 million?

After the interview, each student composes a journal entry with a topic sentence that attempts to make a conclusion about their interviewee.

When they return to class with the journal entry, I ask everyone who interviewed a person who works to raise a hand. Because ours is a commuter campus, usually everyone raises a hand, so I write on the board, "100% of the class works." Going through the rest of the questions, I make rough estimates and put them on the board. For example, usually 75-90% of the class interviewed someone who likes rock music.

From the rough statistics for the preceding questions, I require each student to choose three generalizations as ideas for three separate paragraphs. Using the details from their interview, they compose three paragraphs with the generalizations as topic sen-

tences; however, they must also add two more students as examples to each paragraph. This means they must interview two other students besides the first one they interviewed. The final "essay" contains three paragraphs with three student examples in each paragraph. The following is one unedited paragraph from such an essay:

> Stephanie, Charlene, and Bill are of the 98% working college students in my english class. They all work with the public, and enjoy their work. Stephanie works at St. John's Bank and Trust. She likes the people she works with as well as the customers. She feels her hours at work do not interfere with her school work and social life. At Central Hardware, Bill likes the people he works with as well as helping others out. Working three or four nights a week, he feels his work schedule fits in with his school work. Charlene works at Granada pool as a lifeguard. She too works with the public but mostly with children. She too works three or four nights a week which leaves her time for studing. Charlene likes her job because she works alot with children, meets new people, and the pay is suffecient. All three students enjoy their jobs and feel the pay and hours at work work well with school demands.

This assignment requires the student to see the relationship between a generalization and a specific. I also explain what we are doing and why they must be able to move from general to specific.

After they receive these essays back, I introduce the thesis statement by asking students to make a general statement covering the ideas in their three paragraphs. This leads naturally into the next assignment which requires they make a general conclusion about one aspect of someone's personality and support the general idea with two narratives.

Each assignment requires that they either make a generalization first and then support it, or gather details and make a generalization. Their writing becomes more and more impersonal until the final two essays which deal with magazines. First, they must choose a magazine they are not familiar with and, by examining it closely, come up with an audience. Then, their essay uses details from the magazine to support their choice of audience. This particular assignment truly indicates the range of cognitive ability because less able students will have a thesis such as: "Women are the audience for *Redbook* because they are in the ads and the stories." More cognitively mature students will make generaliaztions like the following: "Young single or married women who see themselves as

successful and intelligent will read *Redbook*." The essay will explain why surveys and articles on sex imply intelligence and why articles and ads about professional women demonstrate that the audience perceives itself as successful.

The final essay of the semester is a comparison and contrast of the first magazine and another similar one. This requires that students be able to reason formally and to move beyond egocentric thinking.

A common complaint about Basic Writers is that they can't write because they can't think. While this assertion is debatable, Basic Writing authorities generally agree that the typical Basic Writer fails to play the abstraction ladder in most of what he/she writes. Yet cognitive psychologists and current writing theorists agree that an ability to abstract, to move from general to specific and back again, is one of the primary skills necessary if one is to progress to higher order reasoning. The Basic Writing teacher, then, usually needs to help students learn to play the abstraction ladder in compositions. This skill can be taught in a semester organized around moving from general to specific in compositions and progressing from personal to impersonal writing.

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Two Strategies for Combining Thinking and Writing

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During the past year, I have had the opportunity to teach separate courses in critical thinking and composition, yet I have spent many hours trying to construct assignments which would embed one discipline in the other. If John Chaffee in *Thinking Critically* is correct and critical thinking *is* the act of making sense of our world by carefully examining our thought processes in order to clarify and improve our understanding (33), then shouldn't we encourage this activity in all our classes? Most certainly it should be part of a writing curriculum in which critical thinking and composition can markedly reenforce each other.

In *Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing,* Linda Flower states that "Problem solving . . . is a form of goal directed thinking" (22). She continues explaining this idea by discussing the advantages writing brings to the entire problem-solving process. Definition, as Flower sees it, is essential to a resolution of conflict. "If you can define your problem, you may have solved it," she states (23), and this ability to define, to select some aspects of a situation and to reject others, encourages a closer inspection of paramount issues. Eventually, defining issues and focusing on them may lead to evaluating the options and finally, to resolution. All stages of this problem-solving technique, states Flower, can be effectively clarified through writing.

Keeping this advice in mind, I tried to create written assignments for my students which would allow them to engage in three fairly typical strategies of a critical thinking class: thinking a problem through, defining the problem by selecting and rejecting information, and evaluating the options presented according to some general rules of logic.

I utilized many types of assignments trying to achieve this integration of thinking and writing — assignments such as formal argument papers; simulation games; and an ongoing discussion of which came first, thought or language. But I believe that the two assignments most useful in getting students started in merging careful thinking with careful writing were the reader's response journal and the analytic essay. These two projects necessitated

close contextual readings, thorough understanding, and the ability to synthesize written materials and personal ideas. Both projects, the journals and the essays, resulted in my students' displaying a stronger voice, more precise organization, a greater awareness of a specific audience, a substantial increase in logical development, a greater willingness to explore thought through writing, an increased ability to analyze and evaluate, and a more powerful style of prose.

The first of these projects, the response journal, may not at first seem a likely analogue to critical thinking. However, this type of journal can be quite effective in merging thought and composition if the instructor selects the writing assignments prudently. Response journals can be used, for example, to encourage students through writing to investigate their own perceptions concerning people, events, and beliefs; the journals can also provide a specific location for students to record on a regular basis their reactions, questions, and comments about literature, essays, or other reading assignments. Just as in problem-solving, the process of defining forces students to focus their attention on the issues. As these issues are further probed, presumptions are identified, tested, and reconstructed, and students begin to reevaluate their beliefs from a more questioning, critical stance. Hopefully, as they acknowledge and deliberate on their own thought patterns, comprehension improves and expands as well.

One of the most successful journal assignments I have given involved Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*. For this project, I handed out a worksheet with some specific questions designed to focus student attention directly on specific issues. The two questions which activated the most critically composed responses — and by critical, I mean serious, searching, and honest — were these: does the end ever justify the means and does the truth ever set one free? Students who had not exhibited the slightest interest in writing became quite articulate, even eloquent, on Willie Stark, Jack Burden, and others. The questions seemed to challenge most of the class, and the responses were surprisingly profound. Writing in the journals gave the students the opportunity to explore not only the motivations, actions, and implications of those actions for Willie, Jack, and the Judge but for themselves as well. The assignment allowed the students to crawl (metaphorically) under, over, and in between such issues as truth, justice, knowledge, power, and love. It also demonstrated to me that directed journal writing can be a very effective strategy for allowing students to work with formal heuristic procedures.

As tools for inculcating critical thinking into a composition program, the journals offer an opportunity for synthesizing what Janet Emig in the introduction to *The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders* has called the reflexive and the extensive modes of writing (4). If the reflexive mode is personal and exploratory, and the extensive mode is impersonal and reportorial, as Emig states, then directed journal writing can combine both. As students narrow the inquiry to probing their thoughts on whether the end ever justifies the means, for example, not only are they exploring personal perceptions and creeds, but they are also investigating the mores, values, and influences of society itself. This society can be the one in which they are currently members, or it can be the society which is described in the reading assignment. In either case, students are asked to read carefully, examine closely, and evaluate thoroughly. At the same time, they are asked to write effectively about the stages of their thought processes and their conclusions. They become more conscious of their own voice, a necessary ingredient for persuasive communication, and they learn that they are obligated to support their statements with facts. Thus, both the extensive and reflexive modes have been utilized.

Journals don't always have to be written *after* a reading assignment, either. They can also be assigned before the piece is read, concentrating attention on expectations and stereotypical situations. For example, before we read *All the King's Men*, I asked my critical thinking class to imagine themselves in a situation where they wanted something very badly and had the information to destroy the only person standing in their way. I asked them what they would do in this predicament? How would they feel? Would they ever use the information to destroy another person in order to attain their own goals?

I asked them to complete a "mapping" assignment, listing their answers to these questions. Then we read the novel, and I asked the students to complete a second map, delineating how Penn Warren's characters resolved this same conflict. By looking at the differences between the two maps, the students were able to perceive many things about themselves and about their fictional counterparts. Finally, I asked the students to comment in their journals upon this entire exercise and to share any conclusions they might have reached. The critical thinkers became critical readers and expressive writers.

The second type of assignment I used to blend thinking and writing was the analytic essay. In class, students read an essay by Roberto Acuna from Studs Terkel's *Working* in which Acuna

describes his life as a migrant farm worker. He states, "The things I saw shaped my life"(7). After discussing this essay, I asked my students to write about a shaping experience of their own, describing the experience and explaining how it had shaped their lives.

In order to do this, they had to read and understand Acuna's piece. They had to think about their own lives and to select an experience that had influenced them. The class wrote about a variety of incidents, including their first day at school, moving to a new community, death, divorce, and initiation into various groups and activities. As I read through their papers, I realized that this assignment had provided them with a catalyst for employing analytic, evaluative, and logical skills — the kinds of skills necessary in order to use language powerfully.

Since the students had exhibited first drafts of unusual quality, I decided to use this project for the small group writer's workshop I was planning. Students read their drafts to a peer group of 5 or 6, and members of the group gave written suggestions and comments to each author. One of the tasks each group member had was to identify for the writer the central assertion of the paper and the main premises on which this assertion was founded. The author collected all the comments, took home the draft, and revised it to his /her own satisfaction. These papers were then submitted for a grade.

This exercise worked well because it incorporated personal and non-personal styles of writing. It also included the aspects of definition, selection, and evaluation. The assignment was broad enough in its scope to allow even the most hesitant of writers (or thinkers) to choose freely a subject of personal importance. Students also had to include explicit supporting data illustrating their claim that this particular experience had shaped their lives. In addition, students read their essays to a peer group which produced instant feedback. The essay was then revised in a deliberate and purposeful manner.

In "Teaching Writing by Teaching Thinking," Peter Elbow discusses what he calls first and second order thinking. "First order," he says, "is intuitive and creative and does not strive for conscious direction or control. . . . Second order thinking is what most people have in mind when they talk about 'critical thinking' " (37). Elbow goes on to say that while first order thinking is used to generate ideas and insights, it is second order thinking that is linked ". . . with slow, thoughtful rewriting or revising where one constantly subjects everything to critical scrutiny" (38). To merge critical think-

ing with composition, therefore, revision must be a part of the curriculum.

Clearly, although I have chosen these two strategies, the response journal and the analytic essay, to demonstrate how thinking and writing can be blended, other assignments would work just as well. As long as the assignment challenges students to exercise reflexive and extensive thinking while it simultaneously engages them in the generation and revision of language, creative thinking and critical writing can both be accomplished.

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Teaching Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum: Notes from a Traveling Writing Teacher

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As a writing teacher, you know that writing teaches critical thinking, and you know that writing in all disciplines is necessary and needs to be encouraged. What can you do to help increase your effectiveness in improving the learning process as well as the effectiveness of students' communication and learning skills in other classes? You become a traveling writing teacher.

No, this doesn't involve passports or even approval of travel expenditures by your dean of instruction. It *does* involve commitment by your school administration to giving a block of reassigned time to a writing instructor to guide students' application of writing formulae to practical assignments in the content courses. It *does* involve faculty members who are willing to allow another in-

structor to look at their assignments and to accept criticism from students who argue that "this isn't supposed to be a writing course." And it entails a school-wide commitment to the eventual evolution from a writing-across-the-curriculum program to a writing/learning-across-the-curriculum program.

The idea of becoming a traveling writing teacher occurred to me after a conversation in which another faculty member was complaining about the quality of students' written work. Why couldn't they write in complete sentences to answer an essay exam question? Why were they unable to organize a message unified around a central idea? Where was their pride in proofreading for spelling errors or comma splices? Where was the English department's accountability in all of this?

I couldn't respond angrily to these questions because I had heard them before — not just at our college. I had heard them at conferences in discussions with faculty at other two-year and four-year colleges. I had heard them from business clients and from friends in the business world who had employees with the same apparent inability to transfer what they had learned in English classes to what they were doing currently.

Therefore, I asked my colleague if I could work with him the next semester to analyze the typical student difficulties and to try to begin an official writing-across-the-curriculum program. He agreed quickly, and sooner than I could believe, there were instructors from five other courses (biology, electronics, world regional geography, criminal justice, automotive engines and automotive tune-ups) who wanted to buy into the project as well. After administrative approval of my plan, we met and discussed the student writing problems common to us, and the goals we hoped to achieve in piloting such a college-wide project. Typically, my colleagues wanted their students to carry over skills in mechanics, organization, synthesis, and research to the particular assignments in their classes.

My specific plan was to familiarize myself with one or two assignments made by each of the participating faculty members. I would make a presentation in class when the assignments were made, and then I would reserve blocks of time for individual conferences with students to discuss their rough drafts and final drafts. Other in-class presentations would be conducted at appropriate times throughout the semester. My role would be to give input but not to assign grades.

As it turned out, the biology, criminal justice, and automotive students had research projects for me to help them with. After

familiarizing myself with the assignments, I made presentations in each class offering organizational possibilities, typical resources for the field, and available examples. These people were then scheduled for two rounds of individual conferences — one for the rough draft and the second for the final draft.

The world regional geography class required several analyses throughout the semester of newspaper articles to determine connections between geography and social/political behaviors. For this presentation I actually did the assignment myself and showed the step-by-step approach to analyzing an article, synthesizing the findings, and creating a thesis idea that is central to the question being asked.

In the electronics class the standing assignment was the lab report. The instructor's required format included areas for stating the objectives, the conclusion, the procedure, description of the experiment, and questions. Since students were already required to write everything in complete sentences, my presentation amplified the types of writing they were actually doing when filling out this form. I explained that process, description, along with analysis and synthesis, were generic terms they would hear within the halls of academia as well as within the walls of IBM.

I have learned two main things after a semester of being a traveling writing teacher. First, the road of the traveling writing teacher is a two-way road. Faculty in other disciplines can and do help writing teachers. How? They can identify problem areas that need more attention in composition classes. In addition, they can share some of their specific topics and actual assignments with us so that we may work through similar kinds of exercises in our classes. By inviting us to talk to their classes, they can create an image of writing teachers who are gregarious — who can walk and talk and adapt to other than writing class situations. And, certainly, our credibility grows when content instructors require excellence in content and form of their assignments because they are convinced that communication skills are so very important and should be stressed by everyone. They can even lend strong voices to student service personnel who already advise students to take writing courses within their first two semesters of college work.

And how can we as writing teachers really help them? We can identify reasons why their writing assignments might be troublesome, such as confusion over the instructions or size of the project compared to time required. We can bring curriculum topics/problems from other areas into our writing assignments so that students become used to the crossover of content and form. We

can make our colleagues' experiences with reading papers more and more pleasant because of the absence of errors in mechanics or in research skills. And, most importantly, we can help to convince them, if necessary, and their students that writing is learning — learning is writing. Their encouraging written expression in several smaller, more frequent writing assignments is the key to better learning as well as better writing.

Second, I have learned what scholars in the field have discussed — the writing-across-the-curriculum programs can be much more. As a traveling writing teacher, I am not just the super editor or super proofreader. And my colleagues are not just nurses waiting for surgeons to remove the obvious mechanical or organizational problems from student writing so that the patients can be sent home cured. Rather, there needs to be a cross-the-curriculum commitment — which becomes really an institutional commitment — to the importance of writing in the learning process. Eliminating errors is especially important, but encouraging writing as a frequent tool in any learning experience is the overriding goal. Writing definitely has heuristic powers.

My forecast for the continued success and expansion of our program is an optimistic one. Part of my optimism comes from the good grade results achieved by those who took advantage of individual conference times. Although some students didn't take advantage of the conferences because of fear, embarrassment, confusion, or whatever, their instructors did *not* know who did or did not confer with me. I kept the only records to help me evaluate the effectiveness of my input. And even though all results are not in yet, it is quite clear that those who attended the conferences achieved consistently higher grades on their papers and received instructor comments about the clarity, completeness, and excellence of the work. As word spreads, I predict that more and more students in future classes will make use of conferences with the writing teacher, and perhaps the content instructors will even make the conferences mandatory.

Currently, instructors volunteering for the project are a courageous lot who risk criticism from students as well as from other faculty members who do not yet see how increased emphasis on writing can mean anything other than more work for them. However, more and more of my colleagues are stopping me in the halls and inquiring about how they might fit their writing assignments into the writing teachers' itinerary. And in our discussions we're learning again and again that students are in need of help in the same basic areas — summarizing, analyzing, and synthesizing. In

short, the lack of critical thinking skills is at the root of all of the problems.

Thus, I predict that as my colleagues become more aware of the traveling writing teacher project, they will realize that it is only a first step in a writing/learning-across-the-curriculum program. Just as my current coworkers are brainstorming ways of making writing an "official" part of their courses (such as course journals, or a one-hour credit adjunct writing course attached to the content course), I predict that we will be organizing faculty workshops to prepare a united effort. We will be analyzing writing assignments and creating ones which make use of what has been discovered about writing and learning by such people as Vygotsky, Piaget, Britton, and Judy.

As a result of these sessions, I predict that our administration will continue its support — philosophical and practical — and share our commitment to the *real* purpose of any such interdisciplinary writing programs. This real purpose is to give students constant opportunities (some graded, some not) to use writing to make connections between information and experience. Perhaps we can help our students get closer to what Einstein called the "real" education — "what you have left after you have forgotten every fact you learned."

The traveling writing teacher project can be a maiden voyage that other writing programs may want to adopt as the first step in a writing-across-the-curriculum program. The fact that our administration and more and more of our faculty are willing to take the trip suggests that the itinerary could be successful elsewhere.

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Teaching the Critical Analysis

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We see it all too often — capable students falter when they confront the critical analysis. As they struggle to find a symbol-laden interpretation that will "dazzle" the instructor, these students suddenly forget the basics of essay structure. The end product is one we instantly recognize: a three-sentence introduction which reappears as the conclusion, long quotations introduced out of context, and unsupported generalizations about love, hate, war, death. Adding to the frustration, some of the students who contribute most to class discussion perform dismally on papers. And the problem sometimes persists through upper-division survey courses in college. But students are not always to blame. Many come to college without ever having written a critical analysis of more than two pages. Furthermore, because college-level literature courses often allow little (if any) time to cover writing in class, instructors must rely on terminal written comments on graded essays to help students perform better on future assignments. Though this approach can yield an improved set of later papers, it does nothing to prevent the inadequate sets of early papers. Clearly, students should have the opportunity to study closely the critical analysis before they sign up for literature courses. I believe that a suitable place for this training is the advanced writing class, whether in high school or in college.

While attending the University of Tennessee, I taught a course devoted to writing about literature (the second quarter of the freshman composition sequence). The course took a thematic approach to the literature and required a minimum of eight themes.

Though these requirements emphasized writing, the instructor was — how to adequately cover a bulk of material so that the students understood it. The early sets of papers contained many problems that were logical and structural rather than interpretative. After weeks of writing lengthy end comments, I realized that the problem demanded class time. I mimeographed copies of good and poor paragraphs from that week's themes and had a workshop similar to those in introductory writing classes. Once the students saw that most of their problems were with essay structure and development, they abandoned the "I-just-didn't-understand-the-story" attitude. One of them even identified a poor paragraph as her own and asked her classmates for suggestions. These were problems they had dealt with before. This quick remedy alleviated some of the difficulty with the remaining assignments, but I still felt it was inadequate. I had spent an entire week teaching standard essay structures like comparison/contrast, cause-effect, or process analysis in the introductory writing class. Didn't the more difficult critical analysis deserve more than one day?

I recently had the opportunity to teach a whole unit on the critical analysis in an advanced rhetoric class at the University of Illinois. Focusing on different essay types such as the humorous essay and the review, the course ended with the critical analysis. The class met on Tuesday and Thursday, and I spent four meetings on this unit. In order to keep paper topics flexible yet somewhat related, I chose four literary works that touched on the same broad theme of love: Chopin's short story "The Storm," Auden's untitled poem beginning "Fish in the unruffled lakes," Lawrence's poem "Love on the Farm," and Sexton's poem "The Farmer's Wife." Besides discussion of the literature, class activities included a brainstorming session for paper topics, a critique of a typical college literature paper, and a rough draft workshop. A syllabus and commentary follow.

Day One: Discuss Chopin's "The Storm" and Auden's "Fish in the unruffled lakes"

Day Two: Discuss Lawrence's "Love on the Farm" and Sexton's "The Farmer's Wife"; Lecture on Critical Analysis

Day Three: Discuss Student Paper (students bring written comments to class)

Brainstorming Session for Paper Topics (students bring topics to class)

Day Four: Rough Draft Workshop (students bring an introduction and one body paragraph to class, as well as any prewriting for the whole paper)

On the first day I had students write an answer to these questions before discussion of Chopin's work began: Is the lovemaking in "The Storm" wrong or sinful? Would Chopin agree with your answer? After we discussed the story, I had students read their responses to the initial questions. This activity helped students see that Chopin's text clearly condones the lovemaking and laid the ground for determining whether or not a text supports one's own opinion. Of course I did not urge the students to adopt Chopin's view, but they could make the initial step toward critical analysis by supporting a generalization with concrete evidence. In discussing the Auden poem, which is more difficult, we approached it as a dramatic argument and paraphrased stanza by stanza what the speaker says to his lover. Working inductively, the students were able to see the distinctions that Auden draws betwen animal and human existence and to come to some generalizations of what he says about the capacity in human beings for love. Again, discussion helped students see the analytical skills involved in interpreting literature.

The poems for day two work as companion pieces, with Lawrence's poem presenting a primitive male-female relationship and Sexton's depicting a more modern couple. Each poem shows a couple's relationship from the wife's perspective. While Lawrence's farm wife is aroused by her husband's dominant role, Sexton's wife does not find fulfillment with her husband. These contrasting views of marriage provide fuel for a lively discussion, and each poem also relates to a work assigned for day one. The profusion of animal imagery in Lawrence's poem recalls Auden's use of animals, while the question of woman's sexual fulfillment circles back to Chopin's short story. After discussion ended I passed out a sheet on Organizing the Critical Analysis and went over its distinguishing features. First I outlined the parts of the essay (Introduction — Body — Conclusion) and explained what each one must include. The handout also covered common pitfalls in writing a critical anlysis such as unsupported generalizations, inadequate development, isolated quotations divorced from their contexts and from commentary, and over-reliance on plot summary. We also discussed how this type of essay differs from the review, which the class had written the week before. Finally, I passed out copies of a student paper and asked the class to study it in light of the handout.

The paper I used for the third day was one I had written as an undergraduate entitled "Masculine Characters in Hemingway's Short Stories." As the title indicates, the controlling idea lacked precision. The introduction gives the general gist of the paper:

> The recurring central characters in Ernest Hemingway's short stories are often of the super-masculine, heroic type. In Hemingway's short story collection *The Snows of Kilimanjaro,* the three most striking characters epitomize this macho image. These characters are Harry in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," Jack Brennan in "Fifty Grand," and Robert Wilson in "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber."

Right away my students detected the main problem. As one of them put it, "Hey, what *is* macho defined as?" They also recognized which body paragraphs tied in with the argument and which one strayed from the thesis. The paper had its good points, such as the sandwich-patterned body paragraphs: topic sentence — detailed support from the text — concluding comments. These paragraphs demonstrated how to integrate quotations smoothly and how to alternate paraphrase and summary with quoted material. After carefully discussing the structure of body paragraphs, we moved on to the conclusion. Again, the students could see the problems as one woman's comment shows: "The conclusion is a repetition of the first paragraph, with a vague recap of the body which says nothing of the characteristics discovered about the *characters* . . . that are supposed to be the focus of the paper." Now the class had a concrete example of a typical undergraduate paper as well as a list of do's and don'ts. Though I did not assign or discuss Hemingway's stories in class, the students recognized the paper's weaknesses *as an essay.* By seeing the paper's logical problems, they could relate the critical analysis to what they had learned about essay writing in previous courses.

After discussing the Hemingway paper, we ended day three by brainstorming for possible paper topics (which I wrote on the board). Here are the ones we thought of:

— the writers' views of love in all the works or in any combination
— animal imagery in Auden's poem and Lawrence's poem
— Auden's view of animal love vs. human love compared to Lawrence's view
— the two poems about farmer's wives — their attitude toward the husbands, toward love
— Sexton, Lawrence, and Chopin on marriage
— the question of sexual fulfillment — especially in Sexton and Chopin

— the relationship between humans and their environment — especially in Chopin and Lawrence
— erotic imagery in Lawrence and Chopin
— the role of women or role of men in Chopin, Sexton, Lawrence
— the function of nature in Chopin, Lawrence, Auden
— the significance of Chopin's title "The Storm"

The students came up with most of these topics on their own. I cautioned them that all topics needed narrowing to be suitable for the assigned three-to-four page paper. By taking an active role in formulating paper topics, the students could enter the thinking process necessary for beginning a critical analysis.

On the final day of this unit the students brought drafted paragraphs for a workshop. Before we examined their writing, I passed out copies of the introductions from two of my more recent papers. We reviewed the "basic" three-sentence introduction that the Hemingway paper contained: (1) identification of the literary work(s), (2) the element(s) of the work(s) the paper will examine, and (3) the thesis. After reading the two paragraphs, the class discussed how they expanded the basic introduction and concluded that each clarified its controlling idea. Next I had the students exchange paragraphs for a peer editing workshop. Each answered these questions about a classmate's work:

Introduction

1. Has the writer adequately defined the paper's scope?
2. Is this scope too narrow or too broad for a 3-4 page paper?
3. Does the writer need to clarify any ideas?
4. Can you find the thesis statement?
5. Does the introduction indicate the paper's organization?

Body Paragraph

1. Is the topic sentence clear? Does it relate back to the thesis?
2. Does the writer adequately support all assertions?
3. Has the writer introduced and commented on all quotations?
4. Has the writer overquoted?
5. Is there a wrap-up sentence for this paragraph?
6. Does the writer stray away from the thesis in this paragraph?

While the students are writing their comments, I spent a few minutes with each one — making sure each student had a suitable thesis and enough textual evidence to support it. Papers were due on the following meeting.

All in all, this unit on critical analysis proved fruitful because I received a very good set of papers. The students received not

only high grades but a clearer understanding of how the critical analysis works, on understanding which they can apply to future classes. This knowledge is essential because competent interpretative skills do not aways yield competent papers. All the papers were not excellent, however. The conclusion proved to be the biggest trouble spot, and one way to improve the unit would be to devote more time to this particular paragraph. Still, teaching the critical analysis as a standard essay structure does improve students' skills more quickly than the usual trial-and-error method. Spending an entire class session teaching this kind of essay certainly takes less time than writing lengthy end comments on thirty papers. Direct teaching of critical analysis can save a lot of frustration — for students and teachers alike.

The Logic in Mystery

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Working with students who have poor reading scores and have been tracked into lower ability courses since entering high school poses several problems. They often express opinions solely as emotions, oversimplify issues, and jump to conclusions. Therefore, at Conant High School, we have developed a critical thinking activity which has prompted some students to think at a high level while working in a non-passive classroom environment.

We began simply enough with Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," one of the stories within our mystery unit. Like so many Poe stories, interest is quickly aroused and then diminished because of the difficult vocabulary. We overcame this by really picking the story apart. After the students read the story, they listened to a professional tape starring Basil Rathbone. We then discussed the plot, characters, and basic content of the selection. Once we were assured that the students had thoroughly familiarized themselves with the elements, we moved into the larger realm of murder and the possible insanity of the main character.

Students were divided into two groups representing the prosecution and defense as we placed the narrator of the story on trial for murder. The prosecution was assigned the task of "proving the narrator guilty of premeditated murder in the first degree." The defense, on the other hand, argued that the defendant was

"not guilty by reason of insanity." Several things were accomplished by the students in the early stages of the trial preparation. The foremost was the need to define terms. Student representatives for each side used the library and/or other sources to define premeditated murder, insanity, homicide, etc., while other students combed the story for specific examples of the character behavior which fit their case. As judges, we insisted that the only evidence admissible was to be comprised of specific quotations with page reference and specific definitions. This way we had the students do the basics of research. In addition to this, notes had to be submitted as evidence to the court before the trial.

During pre-trial preparations, we took time to discuss contemporary cases where the insanity plea was used, such as the murder of John Lennon, the attempted assassination of Ronald Reagan, and the murders in L.A. by the Night Stalker. The most heated discussion involved a recent news story concerning the release of a convicted murderer after his serving a maximum sentence of eight years for the bludgeoning death of his college professor. Issues such as morality vs. legality as well as letter of law vs. spirit of the law set the tone for the critical and inferential thinking that was to be expected during the trial itself. Students were now drawing references from common material and not simply expressing opinions. By giving substance to material, they were now able to debate the issues in the trial itself.

On the day of the trial the teacher played a very important role as judge. We emphasized this by dressing for the part, by wearing a black graduation robe and bringing a gavel to class. Each side had a spokesperson who presented an opening argument for five minutes. During this time the judge maintained order in the court by insisting proper procedure be followed and ruling on any objections being raised. While each side conducted cross-examination, the judge issued contempt rulings when any students became too emotional. A contempt ruling resulted in the loss of daily points in lieu of fines or jail sentences. Students had to take careful notes during presentations because cross-examination was limited to material cited by the opposition. Following cross-examinations, the students moved into their closing arguments. Students were urged to return to basic definitions and the strength of material quoted. Lastly, the judge then weighed the evidence, and handed out a ruling.

The ruling was not contingent upon the narrator's guilt or innocence since it was felt that even skilled attorneys would find themselves at an impasse with this case. What was important was the

clarity of reasoning and the mechanics of the presentation. The students themselves were very honest in recognizing which group presented the stronger case.

This is one of several strategies that we have found to be successful in building critical thinking skills with these students. We feel that the trial was the most successful because it involved the students on so many different levels. It enabled the students to move around and verbalize in a less rigidly structured environment, and yet they were still working with concrete material and a definite goal. A mystery unit provides many opportunities for inference building by the students because of the nature of the material. Another ploy we have used was stopping a mystery movie three-quarters through and having students submit their own conclusions. Recent newspaper articles such as the Melissa Ackerman abduction provided springboards for discussion and helped to stimulate an awareness of current events. We are now looking forward to selecting a mystery novel which will require the students to apply these skills on a larger scale.

Verbalizing Nonverbal Knowledge

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Those of us who teach composition are acutely aware of the relationship between thinking and writing. We cast about for heuristics, trying to jar students out of writing in a predictable manner. We hope they will discover that writing is a way of thinking, a mode of learning. Most of us combine what we intend to be provocative reading and writing assignments.

For several years, I have asked students in junior level writing classes to do what they think, at first, is impossible: to verbalize the nonverbal. These students are average college sophomores, juniors, and seniors in a variety of majors. The assignment challenges them and has been quite successful. I do not give them the actual writing assignment right away; rather, they begin by reading and discussing two articles about human intelligence/understanding and by completing two prewriting activities. The six parts of the assignment should take a week and a half to two weeks to complete in a class that meets two or three times a week.

PART ONE:

For the next class meeting, read "Why Scientists Must Know How to Write" by James Van Allen and prepare for discussion. (This article originally appeared in the University of Iowa *Spectator*, April 1979, p. 7.)

Van Allen himself brings up the need for verbalizing the nonverbal.

> In scientific work, the emphasis of value is on understanding. Understanding is a very elusive concept and there are many and diverse approaches to it. Many persons have a thoroughly clear operational understanding of certain matters in a totally non-verbal way and have never written a descriptive sentence about them in their lives. Examples are persons who change tires on automobiles and who monitor the operation of machinery and who dispatch taxicabs and who operate the great combines that move over our fields at harvest time. Thus, one form of understanding is mechanical. Another is visual or graphical. Another is theatrical. Another is esthetic. Another is musical. Another is gastronomical. It is probably fair to say that, to a considerable degree, verbal understanding is the role of the bystander, not of the performer, in most human activities. . . .
>
> This is the dilemma of the scientist. The substantive content of science is mainly non-verbal, but introducing one's contributions into the general stream of knowledge is necessarily a matter of writing about them. It is fortunate that this is the case, because the writing process itself is a powerful technique for consolidating and advancing one's own understanding. (7)

After a general discussion of the article, I focus on the above passage and list the kinds of understanding on the board, defining terms and inviting students to provide examples for each category. Do they have any of the nonverbal understandings Van Allen mentions? Can they think of any abilities or categories not mentioned in his article?

PART TWO:

Make a list of the ways you know nonverbally. Then write freely about each one for half a page or so.

This activity may be done in class, out of class, or some combination of the two. At the following class meeting, I ask them to share their prewriting in groups of three. The writers elaborate and clarify orally when the readers demonstrate interest or lack of understanding.

PART THREE:

Now focus on *one* kind of nonverbal understanding you have and answer the following questions in complete sentences and paragraphs.

1. What is it you know?
2. How long have you known?
3. Did you learn this from someone else? If so, tell us how.
4. Was this understanding verbal at first, or has it always been nonverbal?
5. Are symbols *other than* verbal symbols involved in this understanding? (music, math)
6. Have you ever shared your knowledge with other people? Tell us about it.
7. Do you think people are born with this ability?
   Or is it acquired culturally?
   Or does it require some sort of formal or informal training?
8. How can you tell when someone else is good at it?

The student writers need a day or two to answer these questions thoroughly and thoughtfully. Then, during class, they share their answers in groups of three.

PART FOUR:

Read "Intelligence and Consciousness" by Thomas Roberts and prepare for class discussion. (This article originally appeared in the *Institute of Noetic Studies Newsletter*, Volume 9, No. 2, Fall 1981. It was reprinted in the *Northern Illinois University Faculty Bulletin*, April, 1983, pp. 4-6.)

PART FIVE:

Now make your nonverbal understanding verbal. Write an essay telling us what it is you know or understand. You may wish to include your answers to the questions in part three, but you do not have to include all of them and you will probably wish to add new information. Remember: the class is your audience.

While the students are working on their essays outside of class, we spend at least one class period discussing the article by Roberts. Most of the students have heard of behavioral and cognitive psychology (even if they have a hazy notion of what they mean), but few are familiar with the psychology of consciousness, the focus of this article. They read and discuss it to further stimulate their

thinking about ways of knowing or kinds of understanding, I generally emphasize the following passages.

In his discussion of the second subtopic, "There are different kinds of intelligence in different states of consciousness," Roberts explains that "we tend to associate intelligence with verbal abilities. This is one type of intelligence." I encourage students to think of their nonverbal knowledge as a kind of intelligence — an ability that others may not have.

In the discussion of creative intelligence (third subtopic), Roberts provides examples of nonverbal genius.

> Einstein reported that he worked largely with body sensations at the early stages of his work. Von Kekule worked out his ideas of molecular structure, including the benzine ring, in a creative reverie. Mozart directly heard his music, and a study of the most productive members of the American Mathematical Society found that they intuited the solutions of their problems, then went back and figured out how they arrived at their solutions.

Geniuses aren't the only ones who tap into nonverbal understanding. (Subtopic six: "High level intelligence includes the ability to select an appropriate state of consciousness") "Teachers, coaches, counselors, and others have spoken of this for years as a 'learning atmosphere,' 'winning attitude,' 'insightful moment,' or 'creative state of mind.'" I ask students to describe experiences they've had that might be labeled in one of these ways. Athletes tell of the mental, as well as physical, conditioning they put themselves through in order to win, while poets explain how they wait for the poem to come. Common to many of their experiences is intense concentration. Here are a few topics students have written about:

a tree feller — the danger of cutting down trees, both healthy and diseased
a logician — analytical thinking
an actor — observing and imitating different centers of gravity
a cook — making Australian Pavlova
a social worker — matching foster children with foster homes
a counselor at a rape crisis center: "how I counsel victims; what I learn from what they don't say"
a swimmer — "knowing I've won the race"
visual memory — forming mental images to aid recall
a deli employee — keeping track of customers, a cash register, and the food supply — all at once
a wrestler — "psyching myself up to win"
a cyclist — "sensing when my bike needs repair"

Occasionally, students will consider the nonverbal sources of their verbal abilities. One young French woman who taught beginning French classes to American students explains how she knows and gradually learns to explain the difference between French direct and indirect objects. A poet relates how his poems seem to write themselves; a fiction writer describes how her mind symbolically transforms everyday people and events into short stories. An English major tutoring in a lab for basic writers senses syntactic patterns before explaining them verbally.

When the students articulate their knowledge, their voices are genuine, their content clear. Here is a flutist on the importance of interpretation: "When I come to extremely melodious sections as I play my flute, I use a distinct vibrato (a slightly tremulous effect) and 'make the music sing,' I use my whole body to release the feelings and emotions within me by leaning into the notes and making the music flow with me." A skier describes getting on and off the lift: "As my skis hit the ground, I stand up then crouch down as low as I can go, like a speed-skier. When the snow is well-packed, and I crouch low enough, my speed is enough to carry me to safety." A musician explains how she listens to music: "When I hear this song, not only do I hear the individual instruments, but I hear them as one." Here's a football player on tackling as a middle linebacker:

> When approaching the runner, you want to keep your shoulders parallel to the line of scrimmage, i.e. you should face the runner squarely. Once you get close to him, which will depend on the speed you're both traveling, try to make yourself wide, able to move quickly either to the left or right, because he may give you the impression that he's running to your left, then suddenly switch. The faster you're moving, the more distance you should give yourself before squaring up.

Finally, a cartoonist reveals one source of his talent:

> Stereotypically, how do women seduce men? One thing they might do is wear something sexually attractive like a negligee. Okay, let's make a cartoon about a woman putting on a sexy negligee to seduce a man. How do we start? Since the idea of wearing a negligee is to look attractive, let's make a list of a few things that look unattractive: dead animals in the middle of the road, overflowing garbage cans, chewed-up apple cores, dirty diapers. Now let's look at the list and see if anything there fits into our prospective "negligee" cartoon. How about a woman wearing a negligee that looks like an apple core? You can draw a woman and a man. The man has an unpleasant look on his face. The caption reads: JOE WAS VERY ATTRACTED TO LAURA UNTIL SHE PUT ON HER NEW APPLE CORE NEGLIGEE.

On the day papers are due, students meet in the same workshop groups. This time, comments are written as well as oral. As representatives of the intended audience, peers are asked to respond as "bystanders" or "performers."

PART SIX: Peer Response

> Many persons have a thoroughly clear operational understanding of certain matters in a totally nonverbal way and have never written a descriptive sentence about them in their lives. . . . It is probably fair to say that, to a considerable degree, verbal understanding is the role of the bystander, not of the performer in most human activities. James Van Allen

Please begin your response to the essay by identifying yourself as a performer or a bystander. Then select one of the following:

1. If you are a bystander (that is, you do not share this particular nonverbal ability), do you now have at least a verbal understanding of the ability?
   a. If you do, refer to passages/organizational techniques/illustrations that enable you to understand. How was the writer able to communicate effectively?

   OR

   b. If you do not, let the writer know how and where his/her communication failed.
2. If you are a fellow performer, (that is, you share this nonverbal ability), tell the writer how well s/he verbalizes. What would you have done differently? What does s/he explain especially well?

The process of trying to verbalize what is essentially nonverbal does make the students think and struggle. If they have problems, it is usually for one of two reasons. (1) They haven't narrowed sufficiently. A person with, for example, musical or athletic ability actually has abili*ties*. Some cooks make gravy; others are good bakers. Gardeners may specialize in African violets, roses, peach trees, or tomatoes. The students must identify the general class of their abilities as well as areas of specialization within that class. I can usually tell if this will be a problem when I read their answers in part three. If the focus is too inclusive, I ask them to specify and to do part three again. (2) Occasionally, students will write all around their ability without ever verbalizing it. They will write to the edge and then stop. I point to sentences that stop at the edge and ask these students to redo their papers, articulating their knowledge at those points. In this assignment, the attempt is as

important as the paper itself. If students fall short — and there is a dimension of the impossible to all this — they have at least tried. The attempt has forced them to think in new ways.

Despite occasional problems, the results of the assignment are generally positive. From an instructor's point of view, the essays are fun to read; I've given the assignment several times and have always been intrigued and surprised by the essays. Students gain confidence from successfully doing what they think they can't do; they also gain respect for their own knowledge and an appreciation for the diversity of talents and abilities in one classroom. In their end-of-semester evaluations, I ask them to rate assignments according to difficulty and learning. Repeatedly they have indicated that this assignment, though the most difficult, is the one they learned the most from.

Sensitizing Students to Nonverbal Language: Adding a New Critical Dimension to the Short Story

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Since I teach short stories regularly, I am constantly on the alert for new ways to evoke critical thinking. James E. Thompson's book, *Beyond Words*, made me aware of unexplored possibilities; he wrote:

> Verbal communication is one of the most studied of human activities. At every level of schooling, from first grade through college, students are required to learn the structure of written and spoken language. Until they have mastered verbal language, students are not considered truly educated. *Nonverbal communication*, on the other hand, is one of the *least* studied of human activities. (1)

Nonverbal communication? What significance can it have in our teaching? What about the available research? Ray Birdswhistell (Knapp, 15) argues that in conversation between two people, the nonverbal content carries more than sixty-five percent of the meaning. Ought we not pay attention to the role nonword language plays in human interaction?

Amid lesson plans, composition evaluations, budgetary requests, and interminable other duties, I turned to examine research on nonverbal communication. Time did not let me play and be golden as it does so romantically for Dylan Thomas in "Fern Hill." Yet I did find ways to study the effects of nonverbal language in my classes. Through narrative literature, particularly the short story, my students and I grew in our understanding of nonverbal experiences.

Research had to be done — quite a bit of it on Saturday or Sunday mornings. I found out that most of my teaching centers on a "left-brain" curriculum because I emphasize the verbal message. According to some investigators, more attention ought to focus on "right-brain" behavior; that includes nonverbal language, or what Rudolph Arnheim calls visual thinking. I sought approaches to guide my students through the "right-brain" world of nonverbal behavior. Almost immediately, I noted that no nonverbal dictionary or grammar system would serve as a compass, should foggy doubt obscure my way. Also, I found that the explorations of others would yield convenient maps; but as I examined their routes, I observed much uncharted territory awaiting discovery.

My research uncovered two excursions into nonverbal regions. The first introduces the terrain, and the second appraises the heartland with a mentor, Albert Mehrabian, as a guide. Both trips demonstrate that nonverbal behaviors are as profuse as flashes arching forth from a Fourth of July sparkler.

On the first journey, those flashes identify stories intertwining nonverbal cues with theme. Through dress and touch, for example, Katherine Mansfield in "Miss Brill" reinforces her dominating idea about an old maid. To offset loneliness, Miss Brill frequents a nearby park. When my students first meet her, she is preparing for such a visit:

> Miss Brill was glad that she decided on her fur. The air was motionless, but when you opened your mouth there was just a faint chill, like a chill from a glass of iced water before you sip, and now and again a leaf came drifting — from nowhere, from the sky. Miss Brill put up her hand and touched her fur. Dear little thing! It was nice to feel it again.

Here the relationship between thoughts and nonverbal behavior subtly amplifies theme. Before the narrative closes, my students realize that in talking to her decaying fox fur, Miss Brill is conversing with herself. She longs for the recognition touch brings.

As I direct my students throughout the story, I alert them to the recurrences of nonverbal expressions associated with dress.

At the park, for instance, Miss Brill observes the new coat of the conductor, the velvet one of an old man, and the shabby ermine toque of a woman who bought it "when her hair was yellow." I ask my students what nonverbal messages these observations contribute to theme development.

The author's use of touch-flashes from our sparkler unifies the story's intent. What can be said about the odd old man in the park? As four girls walk side by side, they nearly push him aside. Is he the counterpart of Miss Brill? And the young couple on the park bench? Miss Brill studies the young man's quest for intimacy. With a rude remark, he drives her away, and she hurries home, broken, where she tearfully returns her fur to its box.

Exemplified by dress and tactile behavior, physical actions underscore Miss Brill's inner conflict while they support an organic arrangement of details for thematic effect. A clear judgment of Miss Brill, I point out to my students, necessitates a careful assessment of nonverbal communication.

To associate nonverbal mannerisms with theme, my young people needed, of course, to categorize the nonverbal domain. Classification schemes abound, ranging from three areas to eighteen or more. To abbreviate my students' search, I present them with a simple system, or, as I have done with lots of fun and argument, I approach the lesson inductively and let my students illuminate their own boundaries for nonverbal analysis. For instance, my classes can examine photographs, dramatize literature, play pantomime, or run a videotape normally and then view frames singularly to search for nonverbal cues. Such scouting frequently bewilders students. Flashes are everywhere. At times I lead my students, as I inform them that their reconnaissance parallels scholarly searches to define nonverbal expressions. These young discoverers soon realize that, unlike verbal communication, we have not invented a nonverbal language system. No grammar strings together identifiable patterns of nonword behavior.

To assist my students, I introduce them to my own nonverbal categories, derived from many explorations. Under the major headings of physical and social, I include for the former, face, voice (paralanguage), body action, and for the latter, space (personal and territorial) and status indicators. My endeavor corresponds with those of many others, although I subsume the face, separating it from body movements to emphasize facial expressions as the primary source for emotional displays. As Macbeth says:

> Your face, my thane, is as a book where men
> May read strange matters.

I lead my students to Knapp's *Essentials of Nonverbal Communication* in which he details seven nonverbal areas somewhat akin to my own. No matter where my young researchers turn, however, they discover overlapping areas that set aside discrete categories. Although consensus is absent, enough uniformity in available sources prompts a workable scheme.

So far my classes' exploration of nonverbal communication identifies with what Steinfatt calls "stimulus categories" (113). Then I introduce my students to Albert Mehrabian, who offers noteworthy substance. In his *Silent Messages*, he organizes nonverbal communication according to basic dimensions of human emotions. His emphasis is one of function rather than stimulus, and his thesis is reminiscent of Louis Sullivan's famous remark, "Form follows function." Mehrabian views the display of feelings as the major province of nonverbal expressions. Three dimensions, immediacy, status, and responsiveness, and their accompanying nonverbal actions, he argues, define emotional relationships.

In the realm of literature, these dimensions abound to support Mehrabian's unique view of the nonverbal world. In Jessamyn West's "Sixteen," for example, how do nonverbal cues signal the emotional tone? "Sixteen" centers upon a dying old man, grandfather of Cress, a college student. Young love entertains her, and she thrives on Shakespeare's "O spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou." But an abrupt call from her father threatens her tender experience — she must come home immediately. Angered and reluctant to leave her boyfriend Edwin, she measures the situation as "silly and unfair. . . ." Her response anticipates the immediacy principle.

This dimension, as Mehrabian indicates, simply states that we approach those persons or things we like and avoid those we dislike. What silent messages identify the immediacy metaphor? Students can explore this question through reading "Sixteen." When Cress returns home, for example, her mother directs Cress to tend to her grandfather. Rubbing ointment in hand, Cress approaches her grandfather and leans over him, "rubbing, but with eyes shut, dipping her fingers often into the gray grease."

I question my students about Cress' indirection. Her nonimmediate behavior, lack of eye contact, suggests other nonverbal mannerisms associated with the immediacy dimension.

Analogues exist in students' lives. What distances do they maintain among their classmates? Their parents? Do they look directly at those they dislike? Where do they sit in the lunchroom? Whom

do they touch? To answer these questions is to realize the extensive display of the immediacy dimension — flashes arch unendingly.

An understanding of the second dimension, power, emerges from a close reading of William Faulkner's "Barn Burning." In this story, the prominent dramatic incident occurs when Ab Snopes, a vicious sharecropper and arsonist, pushes his way into the home of his employer, Major DeSpain, and grinds his manure-laden foot into a white rug.

DeSpain lives in a place as "big as a courthouse." It is, of course, a status symbol, serving to separate the Snopes family in a social hierarchy that the father, Ab Snopes, abhors. His violation of that courthouse highlights the power dimension as it centers upon the concept of territoriality in which there exists a relationship between status and the exercise of power.

My students quickly recognize the relevancy of territoriality. I ask them about parental "invasion" of their bedrooms — an unannounced entry violates their staked-out domain, and nonverbal action stirs up a verbal battle. Young people easily view Snopes' rudeness as encroachment and territorial contamination. Like themselves, Major DeSpain defends his boundaries only to suffer further violation through the burning of his barn.

Status differences clearly underline the power metaphor. Most students realize this observation when they step into the principal's office. Who is usually more relaxed? The school head or the student? Who leans back? If some students sizzle MacDonald hamburgers, how do they react nonverbally when their boss stalks by? On the football or hockey fields, how do contentious players explode over a referee's poor judgment? Dominant in these situations is spatial behavior, territorial and personal. With title looms power.

Responsiveness, the third and last dimension, Mehrabian defines as "the extent of awareness of the reaction to another" (p.v.). In a human relationship, I direct my students to observe the *degree* of involvement. Another story, Eudora Welty's "A Visit of Charity," reveals the responsiveness metaphor. Marian, the main character, stops at an Old Ladies Home to earn points in her Campfire Girl merit rating. As she encounters an old woman with hands like bird claws and eyes like sheep, Marian finds the institution repulsive. When an inmate struggles to touch her hair, Marian dons her hat. Then the aged woman seizes Marian who "pulled violently against the old hands for a moment before she was free." While reminiscent of the immediacy dimensions, Marian's nonverbal reactions

are viewed quantitatively as we assess the intensity and amount of change that occurs within the young visitor.

I ask my students to examine their own exercise of responsiveness. As they engage in conversation with a classmate or a teacher, they assess their display of facial expressions, gestural action, and vocal inflections. To what extent do these nonverbal cues indicate their degree of involvement? Is it high or low responsiveness? Why? Did it change?

These probing excursions into the nonverbal world alert students to silent messages. As they recognize the relationship between verbal and nonverbal communication, young people engage in holistic thinking, a "right brain" function. They realize that nonverbal signals, while so frequently expressing emotions, often clarify, replace, confirm or contradict verbal communication. And they exhibit greater sensitivity to their display of nonverbal cues.

So do we as we shift our focus from a word-centered curriculum and discover aspects of communication we have left unstudied. A new awareness promotes evaluation of our nonverbal style. What is it? We are constantly sending nonverbal messages. Are they beneficial to us as we teach? Meet friends? The more we contemplate the nonverbal world with its myriad of flashes, the more we engage in right hemispheric experiences — the "mind's eye," visual thinking, ensues.

We cannot and need not leave the verbal world behind. But we can explore our subject matter in ways that also include the nonverbal domain. A quest for right brain stimulation enlarges the learning experience and does for us what Alice's adventures did for her. We become "curiouser and curiouser" as we explore the nonverbal world.

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A Critical Pursuit of Cues: Introducing Semiotics

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Why do local TV news shows report a murder case almost every day? Is it a coincidence that *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* and *The Name of the Rose* are off the bestseller lists but still stocked in so many shopping center bookstores?

Both questions are typical of the questions asked in semiotics, a field and method of inquiry that has become increasingly important in interdisciplinary humanities. In the last twenty years, semiotics has become known for being both widespread and interdisciplinary. There is no reason to doubt that it is widespread, especially because of Barthes in France, Fiske and Hartley in England, Scholes in the United States, and Eco in Italy. Nor is there any reason to doubt that semiotics is interdisciplinary. It is used by Foulkes in literary theory, Geertz in anthropology, Quentin Skinner in intellectual history, Asa Berger in American Studies, and John Cawelti in Popular Culture.

However, there is also no reason to doubt that some people view semiotics as esoteric and incoherent. Some art theoreticians and literary critics claim that the axioms of semiotics are blurred by arcane terminology and hidden by obscure diagrams. And some of these theoreticians and critics imply that semiotics is too sophisticated or pedantic for the general or even the educated public to understand.

This reputation for being esoteric and obscure does not necessarily block semiotics from being practical and coherent. There was a time when intellectual history was a subject studied only by a small group of students and associates of Arthur O. Lovejoy. Cultural anthropology used to be a field so eccentric that it was considered as more of a hobby than a subject to be studied in college. Even literary theory was once a way of thinking used in writing essay exams and term papers but not in bookstores or around TV sets. Each of these subjects was once considered marginal because some people believed it emphasized matters better left in the background or it used terminology of interest only to technicians. Yet each of these subjects eventually clarified situations, resolved conflicts or solved problems that the more conventional disciplines could or would not handle.

One such situation today is the teaching of introductory humanities courses to ordinary students, and semiotics offers some assistance. Many teachers and graduates are dissatisfied with these courses. One reason is that the poems, paintings, and other objects of aesthetic pleasure are too distant from those actually experienced in the everyday life of ordinary students. Another is that the bridges between the various disciplines are simply too abstract. Both of these tendencies, however, can be reduced by a use of some axioms of semiotics although it is first necessary to locate these axioms and to show their utility and coherence.

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For instance, a brief response to the initial question about televised news reports of murders suggests an important semiotic principle. Begin by finding the bits and pieces in a TV broadcast which lack a stated meaning. During a news film at the scene of a murder a few nights ago, the TV reporter identified the people in the film as bystanders, members of the victim's family, and other neighbors. Yet, she did not say anything about some of the other people in the film: paramedics, ambulance drivers, and police photographers. In a news film about another murder case reported during the same broadcast, a reporter told about the testimony of a minister during a trial but did not mention the lawyers, detectives and judge also involved in the trial. In neither broadcast was there an assertion of what was meant by the inclusion in the cast of characters of police detectives, forensic technicians, and trial judges. What is meant by including them in the cast is considered obvious and is taken for granted. What is meant by their inclusion is simple enough: detectives, technicians, and judges exist as parts of a whole, a whole system of professional and scientific and logical procedure. This whole system of collective resources is organized and focused on a situation in which there is a temporary breakdown of civilization. In the kinds of murders usually reported on TV, the system successfully responds to the uncivilized incident. In short, the news about a murder case is not only the grim gore but also the eventual triumph of the civilized community's system.

In this kind of response to the initial question, the accent is on signs.[1] For Umberto Eco, a sign is any item that, because of social custom or intellectual tradition, stands for or means something else. Like Eco, Mary Heller, John Fiske, and John Hartley study signs but must also study the historical events, social activities, and philosophic discussions in which the members of a particular community participate. Understanding the signs demands knowing

how they are used and by whom. Thus, a police captain being interviewed on a news show about a murder case is an image or sign that implies the whole force of science and technology being brought to bear against a murderer. What the news report tells is the street address and the personal injuries of the victim; what the news report shows are the systematic procedures and collective responses to a particular instance of savagery.

Finding the signs is one principle of semiotics. Another is included in a response to the continued shelf life of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* and *The Name of the Rose*. A curious point about both novels is that they continue to sell long after the initial flurry of publicity even though most bestsellers do not. Even more curious is that both novels celebrate a type of character who can read tracks and uncover clues but also misinterpret and even misjudge. Neither novel depicts a Sherlock Holmes. Instead, both show a character more like Bogart's Sam Spade or John Wayne's Hondo. They are individuals who try to find out what the masquerade and the camouflage hide. They are individuals who try to detect but not always with success. They use deceit to conceal information, like Redford and Hoffman in "All The President's Men." Indeed, techniques of investigation are used to follow and identify opponents from "The Maltese Falcon" through "All the President's Men" to *Zen* and *Rose*. In these texts the tracker also eventually faces the fact that no method of investigation, research or detection is a guarantee of success.

This kind of response — seeking a set of motifs in more than one text — stems not from the concept of sign but from the concept of intertext. For semioticians, an intertext is a combination of scenes, terms, actions or ideas that are shared by or common to a set of texts. The principle of intertext is merely the notion that a text's items may repeat, emphasize, contradict, or reinforce items in other texts. In short, semioticians believe that one way to understand a text is to unravel its intertext.[3]

Both semiotic axioms — find the signs and unravel the intertexts — are useful to me as I attempt to identify and understand the particular group of students to whom I am supposed to teach an introductory humanities course. Instead of looking at ACT scores or asking students about their intended majors, I use questionnaires and conversations to identify the kinds of signs and intertexts that actually provide aesthetic pleasures in their everyday experiences.

What I find is that the signs (both images and ideas) of the students this year are not located in novels and books. Instead, the signs exist in posters (sports and music), in songs ("Stairway to

Heaven" and "Purple Rain"), in slang ("nerd" and "geek"), and in certain TV characters (Eddie Murphy, Hawkeye, and Thomas Magnum). When I ask students what these posters, words, and characters mean, I get answers that usually cluster around three concepts the students apparently admire and perhaps lack: being unique, having control, and using power.

What I find is that the intertexts my students identify are located not in novels and books but rather in TV reruns, record albums and popular films. Although some of my students do watch TV melodramas, such as "All My Children" and "Dallas," the majority of the students who watch TV watch late-night TV, especially reruns of "Saturday Night Live" and "M*A*S*H." As for albums, the one that is used as a reference in conversations to illustrate or clarify a comment this year is still "The Wall." Films, including those made for TV, are frequent allusions in conversations too, especially "The Burning Bed," "Fatal Vision," and "A Soldier's Story."

When I ask students what these reruns, albums and films share, a common answer highlights the topic of intimidation. The students are quick to notice that J.R. in "Dallas," Frank Burns in "M*A*S*H" and Sgt. Waters in "A Soldier's Story" intimidate other people frequently. On the other hand, the students notice that the victims use humor to strike back or get even on "Saturday Night Live" but that more drastic means are used in "A Soldier's Story" and "The Burning Bed." It is not peculiar that these ordinary students actually understand and enjoy intertexts about intimidation and retaliation.

What I find, especially at the beginning of a semester, is that the everyday life of ordinary students contains many aesthetic pleasures; however, these are aesthetic experiences of radio editorials not Philosophy, TV ads not Art, soap operas not Literature, and rock videos not Music. What I notice is that students understand many signs in the humanities in everyday life, but these signs in the mass media are intended to allow easy access, quick intelligibility, and instant gratification. What I hear in conversations and read in questionnaires is that ordinary students do absorb intertexts in editorials, songs, ads and stories, but these intertexts are so familiar that they are taken for granted.

In other words and from a different viewpoint, the responses of the students to the signs and intertexts in their own experiences are, in one sense, passive. The students learn to accept a sign, including its image and idea, without deciding whether that sign is in some sense true and without seeking connections between that

sign and others. In addition, too many students numbly accept intertexts that reiterate the very presuppositions that indoctrinate and manipulate students-as-consumers of mass entertainment.

One way to approach this tendency to respond numbly to signs and intertexts involves a semiotic notion of textuality.[3] The principle is simply to stress that a text is an act of communication. There are, of course, some obvious implications. Any text includes items arranged in a set. Someone selects and arranges these items for someone else. The set or form of items includes an idea that dominates and unifies the items. Thus, any text consists of an implied author, a formal idea, and an intended reader. Since these parts of a text are linked as components of an act of communication, a unity of a class discussion of a text is possible by focusing on these components.

For instance, after seeing a film, "A Soldier's Story," some of my students were curious about its meaning. Because it is notoriously difficult to specify the kinds of people who constitute the audience of a nationally distributed film, the students could not merely chart author-form-reader. They could, however, find the film's meaning another way: by attending to a text that is a variation of another. In the case of "A Soldier's Story," another text was available. The scripts of "A Soldier's Story" and "A Soldier's Play" are both by Charles Fuller, but the dates of composition, the forms, and the audiences differ: the one was a two-act play for the Negro Ensemble Company under the direction of Douglas Turner Ward at Theatre Four in New York in 1982 while the other was a film by Columbia Pictures under the direction of Norman Jewison with a national distribution in 1984. After studying the film as a variation of the play, the students delineated the text of "A Soldier's Story." To the students, the film's form, especially the ending with its differences from the ending of the play, embodies an idea that black American soldiers at Fort Neal do resolve the conflicts of being black in America and do indeed march off to war with flags waving and music playing. To the students, this formal idea makes sense to those members of a national community who bought tickets to see a mystery set among black American soldiers at a Southern camp in 1944. In the classroom, delineating a text is just a matter of exploring connections between writer, form and reader. In the classroom, a result is that often students actively attack and defend interpretations.

Yet these three simple implications — authors, form, and readers — fuel bitterly fought controversies in the humanities today. As E. D. Hirsch and other intentionalists emphasize the purpose of the

author, and as Stanley Fish accents the responses of the readers, so do de Man and Derrida stress the incongruities in the message. The semioticians keep singing about the blind men and the elephant.

Another controversy involves the relation of a text to the circumstances around it. Many theoreticians and technicians insist that a text exists as a response by readers and writers to a historical situation, e.g., King's *Firestarter* appeals to people who sense that governmental agencies can go awry or amuck even as some theoreticians and technicians insist that a text exists as a response to other texts in a genre, e.g., King's *Firestarter* appeals to people who read other horror novels and spy novels. In this controversy both sides sometimes imply that historical circumstances or literary genre determine what a text means. On the other hand, semioticians claim that authors may or may not choose a particular passage's meaning. Semioticians also insist authors may choose to refer to other texts or to other events or even both, but the choice of reference does not necessarily determine meanings. In short, semioticians generally assume that understanding textual references aids finding the intelligibility of a text and also is a useful technique in delineating the text as a act of communication.

For example, "Dirty Laundry," a song by Don Henley, is familiar and also enjoyable to the majority of my students. The students hear the song's condemnation of TV reporters who spend more time being attractive than being clear. As students realize that the original audience of the song was teenagers, so do the students argue about the TV news shows and the rock radio station "news breaks" that merely announce current gossip about celebrities. Like Henley, the students wonder whether the confusion of gossip and news is a reflection of those who present the news or those who consume it.

A class discussion of the song involves more than attempts to find the signs, unravel the intertexts, or delineate the text; a class discussion can also involve the matter of context. Seeking contexts is another axiom of semiotics. If a context is the items that surround a particular item, then it sounds simple to discover the set of items in which the particular item fits. It is a bit more complex than that because various contexts exist, depending on the kind of attention paid to a song. One context of a particular image in a song is the other images in the song. Yet, attending to the whole song rather than to one image in the song demands finding a context of the whole song. A song's context can be the biographical events of the songwriter, the historical situation at the time of the song's composition, or the ideological tensions experienced by the

members of the culture. In short, textual references to biographical, historical or ideological context are clues to what was meant by a song, film, poem, novel, photograph or painting. In "A Soldier's Story" or "Dirty Laundry" the implicit or the explicit references to a particular context can generate informed discussions but can pose a still more complicated and controversial issue too.

For many semioticians, to think about the nature of context demands addressing the issue of the relations betwen "reality" and texts. For A. P. Foulkes, the nature of context involves the relations of the text and the world. Although some texts may separate poetic or fictional constructs from actual or ordinary truths, Foulkes contends that not all texts do. He mentions that the existence of censorship indicates that some people hold the view that some texts do indeed pertain to the world. As an illustration, he notes the existence of prejudice in Nazi poems in the 1930s and suggests that those poems were not necessarily separated from other activities and events in the world.[4]

Riffaterre, another semiotician, suggests a different reason for believing that some texts are connected to some human experiences of the world. He argues that the characterization of any particular kind of humanly experienced world can assume the existence of such a world. My students would probably agree that "A Soldier's Story" centers on the experiences of the fictional Sergeant Waters and Captain Davenport in Fort Neal in 1944 and that both men are imaginary characters. My students would also agree that some real people were caught in the frustrating nightmare of being black Americans in the South's military posts during World War II. In addition, my students would probably agree with Riffaterre when he argues that a text that denies or negates or refutes the existence of something is at the same time presupposing the existence of that something. After all, Captain Davenport's sorrowful contempt for those who ruthlessly destroy "geechies" or geechee-haters shows the civilized mind of Davenport even as his sorrowful contempt for them indicates the existence of "geechies" and their haters. And "Dirty Laundry" includes a criticism of something in the world and thus assumes that that something does exist. One of the song's verses includes the notion that TV broadcasters who have their positions because of their personal attractiveness do not want to show and tell what really happens. My students are quick to point out that that verse assumes that someone could know and explain what really happens.

Some people, who believe it is possible to know what really happens in colleges today, insist that ordinary students are too

literal. It is said that they can find facts but not values, details but not ideas, and assertions but not assumptions. It is also said that they notice a thing as if it were in a vacuum. To the extent that these criticisms are true, ordinary students pose a challenging problem for any teacher of an introductory humanities course.

Another axiom of semiotics generates classroom activities directly addressing habits of such literal thinking. This axiom involves the concept of codes and is a reminder to uncover codes. To do so, however, requires knowing what semioticians mean by "code" and knowing how to decipher a coded text and also knowing why it is important to understand a code.[6]

A code, to semioticians, is simply a set of ideas which are both covert and coherent. Such a collection of ideas may consist of concepts, rules or values. Since they are not actually stated in the text, the ideas are hidden or covert. Still, the ideas exist in the text as implications. In addition, the ideas implicit in a text are connected to each other.

Knowing how to decipher a code is another matter. Briefly, a conception of semioticians is that particular meanings that are both implicit and relational may be understood by members of a cultural group since those meanings are conventional and thus recognized in that culture. Eco provides a useful example. When the first medical doctor noticed a connection between red spots and measles, it was an inference. Later, the connection became familiar in the community of doctors. Eventually, within the medical community the red spots stood for measles. Thus, when something means something else and when that meaning is learned and recognized by members of a cultural community, a code exists.

As for the importance of deciphering a code, to overlook or miss a code is to understand only part of what a text means. To understand what was meant by someone, it is necessary to uncover the code(s) used by that person. If the only meanings understood by a person who sees, hears or reads a text are the literal meanings, that person misses those implications that are shared in a cultural community.

During a series of class discussions of the "Star Wars" films, my students applied a concept of code to the character of Obi-Wan Kenobi. Some of the students held the belief that he was an archetypal character, the Wise Old Man. They argued that the affection for him by film audiences around the world stems from the human interest in the veteran who indirectly communicates exceptional insights to a young person who is "lost" or "stuck." Other students took the position that he represents for an American audience "the

professional," a person educated in a tradition that consists of a particular way of thinking and a particular set of values. At first these students compared Obi-Wan Kenobi to Jesuit priests and corporate lawyers. When other students pointedly remarked that he is identified in the films as "the last of the Jedi knights," the equation of him to priests and to lawyers was withdrawn. At that point, the students agreed that archetypes are a kind of code but also contain signs and appear in intertexts.

It is not unusual that a class discussion that begins with the use of one semiotic axiom eventually incorporates others. It is merely one more instance of the coherence of the semiotic axioms: detect the signs, unravel the intertexts, delineate the texts, find the contexts, and uncover the codes.

iii

Even though semiotic axioms can be formulated so they are clear to students in an introductory humanities class, semiotics is still open to objections. Three pertain to the utility of semiotics.

It is said that semiotics is not practical due to the tendency of many semioticians to favor terminology that is unusual rather than familiar. One, indeed, does have to decipher the terms of many semioticians, and many semioticians do seem to write only for one another. However, saying that something is out of the ordinary is also a matter of viewpoint. As Frye and Burke have to be deciphered, even by those versed in literary studies, so must students and teachers of philosophy decipher Kant and Sartre. For that matter, the study of art history or literary criticism is, among other things, a mater of figuring out which meaning of "form" is meant by a particular artist or in a particular period. Also, there is some justification for the use of new terms. If the emphasis is on unexpected relations of familiar items, some signal of emphasis is needed for clarification. In addition, using a term in a principle, e.g. the reminder to unravel an intertext, can unify a series of lectures, discussions or assignments about a variety of texts in an introductory humanities class.

It is also said that semiotics is not practical because most of the semioticians do not use one specific, limited topic as a starting point. Indeed, semioticians do lack a finite problem, finite in the sense of Larry Thomas, a noted Midwestern artist and Lincoln College teacher. He claims that "finite" problems are problems that are fixed or set even before a person experiences or observes a situation to which the preconceived problem applies.

As a matter of fact, most semioticians assume that any text is fairly intricate although the degree of intricacy depends on the

particular text. Since the textual elements are interwoven, what actually happens in a semiotic inquiry is that the inquiry may begin with whatever element (sign, intertext, context, etc.) seems problematic. Thus, interpreting a text is similar to working a jigsaw puzzle. One begins more or less with any piece and tries to fit others to it. This may be why a student near the beginning of a course may be bewildered and ask, "where do I start" or "how do I know where to begin."

In addition, finite points of departure are not necessarily advantageous. A standardized question or problem may be more typical of those kinds of departmentalized disciplines that create audiences whose expectations are so narrow that the various audiences have nothing to say to each other. Instead of further fragmenting an already compartmentalized knowledge, many semioticians want to encourage the connecting of philosophical studies of codes, historical studies of audiences and literary studies of signs. In an introductory humanities course, this pursuit of connections not only broadens interests in the various fields of the humanities but also intensifies awareness of the textuality of poems, paintings, and films.

Still another objection to semiotics is that the use of a semiotic method lacks practical consequences. During a job interview a teacher of film studies once told me that he had never read an interpretation by a semiotician that changed his mind about the text being interpreted. Perhaps his comment was merely a curious exhibition of a quality of his own mind. Or perhaps he was simply one of those who expected that there is some magic method somewhere that offers a way to truth like the sword or key given by a Wise Old Man in a fairy tale long ago. Yet, a simple truth is that there are many methods in the humanities because there are so many questions.

The genre approach is appropriate for some questions; the affective approach is appropriate for others; even the semiotic approach is appropriate for others. If one wonders why a Navaho character in a Tony Hillerman mystery novel says that a traditional Navaho who dislikes being alone is like a mole who fears darkness, Eco and Berger offer some helpful advice about detecting the meanings of signs that are conventional in a cultural community. If the interruptions in the monologues of George Carlin or Eddie Murphy seem problematic, notice the hints by Culler for understanding an author's digressions. If "Dune" or Vidal's *Lincoln* seem oddly isolated from the actual world of Reagan and Thatcher, notice what A.P. Foulkes and Robert Scholes say about the connections among texts and community.

In an introductory humanities course for ordinary students, it is probably enough and perhaps too ambitious to ask students to pursue signs, texts, intertexts, contexts and codes in TV news shows, "Dirty Laundry," and "A Soldier's Story." However, there are more advanced levels of study too. One is to apply the the same axioms to more complicated texts by authors like Montaigne, Mozart, Van Gogh and Bellow. Another involves the pursuit of various kinds of disjunctions, especially digressions and interruptions and discrepancies. For instance, the interruptions of signs or sets of signs in a text may begin a semiotic inquiry about what was meant by the interruptions just as a passage's digression from its genre's typical characteristics may start one to wonder whether the author's digression was accidental or intentional. At still a different level, a point of departure for a semiotic inquiry may be when one notices that a particular set of texts contradicts relevant intertexts.

Take, for instance, the discrepancies between our stated claims about the purposes of higher education and the actual experiences in lecture classes in auditoriums in some state universities. Behind the obvious disparity, on each side of the lectern, there are hidden agendas and even counterfeit pleasures. Learning how to find the signs and meanings and codes in college catalogues and formal lectures is a conventional part of introductory humanities courses, and a little help from semiotics is not too harmful.

Notes

[1] Arthur A. Berger's *Signs in Contemporary Culture* (N.Y.: Longman Inc., 1984) is a book that introduces semiotics with the least amount of arcane terminology. Using a popular and witty style, he focuses on the semiotic conceptions of sign and code. Another explanation of the concept of signs, making use of the concepts of metaphor, metonymy and symbol, is by John Fiske and John Hartley. Their book is *Reading Television* (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1978).

[2] A good place to begin to learn about a semiotician's conception of intertext is Jonathan Culler's comments about "presuppositions" in *The Pursuit of Signs* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981). A more technical explanation is Michael Riffaterre's "Intertextual Representation..." (*Critical Inquiry* 11(September, 1984), 141-162).

[3] Although it sounds obvious to say that a text is an act of communication, the topic of "textuality" is as complex as it is controversial among semioticians. A clear position is taken by Robert Scholes in *Semiotics and Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); an opposing position is held by Floyd Merrell in *Semiotic Foundations: Steps toward an Epistemology of Written Texts* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982). One of the differences between these two is that Scholes works from a literary orientation while Merrell works from an interdisciplinary orientation.

[4] In *The Search for Literary Meaning: A Semiotic Approach to the Problem of Interpretation in Education* (Berne: Herbert Lang and Co., Inc., 1975), A. P. Foulkes discusses the links between texts and worlds in extended detail. Floyd Merrell's explanation in *Semiotic Foundations* is thorough too. Robert Scholes is also clear on this topic.

[5] Almost any semiotician discusses or applies the concept of "codes." Perhaps the best introductory explanation is by Berger and the most comprehensive is in Umberto Eco's *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1976). Some knowledge of semiotics is a prerequisite for reading Eco.

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